THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

argosy

November

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Acknowledgements are due for permission to reprint copyright material: to J. M. Dent for the Ogden Nash verse from "Versus"; to Elek Books for the extract from "Cats in the Belfry" by Doreen Tovey; to Faber and Faber for the lines by C. S. Calverley and Justin Richardson, from "Verse and Worse"; to the Harvill Press for "In the Mist" from Kazakov's collection "The Smell of Bread"; to John Murray and to John Betjeman for the lines from "The Olympic Girl", taken from his "Collected Poems"; to Penguin Books for the Pendennis Castle extract from "Yet More Comic and Curious Verse"; to the Public Trustee and to the Society of Authors for the extract from George Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman".

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MASQUERADE

BY SAUL MALOFF

Strangers playing the part of old friends, and strangely enough enjoying their make-believe . . .

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HE read the letter again, this time more slowly, pausing here and there at what should have been clues, but for the life of him he could not place its author in his memory. Yet the tone of the letter—warmly familiar, even conspiratorial, almost to the point of intimacy—presumed his instant recognition. Twenty-odd years, he thought, do make a difference; though not, apparently, to her. One of those eternal alumnae, he thought; one of those women who are for ever transfixed at some point in their lives at which the maiden's roseate dream is still believable, a split second before the violence is done, smiling despite the rumours of time. He imagined her as one of those perpetual girls who sent clever biographical notes to the college magazine, listing her husband's little triumphs, the births, the graduations, an elder child's singular achievement, her own brave little efforts at being not merely a mother, not merely a wife, but her own woman. Her face kept slipping out of his memory, a silhouette in a group.

The letter had come the week before, to prepare her way. Though rare, such a letter was not unique in his experience. At long intervals his small measure of precarious renown as a character actor brought him such fruits of victory: a stranger's uncertain recognition at a party, a congratulatory letter from an old high-school teacher, his name mentioned in passing in a newspaper review, a schoolgirl's letter saying she would be so grateful that she would do *anything* if he would help her to become a professional actress.

He read the stranger's letter again. She chattered energetically about people whose names meant nothing to him. Why had he never come to a reunion? she scolded. They had missed him. Had fame made him forget his old friends? The only anchor in the letter was a name he knew well enough, a man with whom he still exchanged annual letters and had seen every now and then down the years, a pretence of old friendship. Their only bond, really, was that their daughters had been born in the same month and that they had left their wives in the same year. In his Christmas-time letter, the man still made joking reference to these odd ties.

She had run into this old friend and was delighted to have news of him, though she was dreadfully sorry to learn his marriage had worked out no better than her own. She would have preferred to hear from him directly, she said, but she knew how busy he must be and how remote the past must seem.

He tried again to remember her face or something about her, but all he could recall was himself adrift at that age, and boys

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and girls from whom he had felt estranged in varying degrees. All that came back were indistinct smiling faces which became the same face, the smooth and transparent skin of astonishing youth, fair eyes and glistening hair and perfect teeth. More clearly than faces, he recalled clothes: cashmere sweaters and flaring wool skirts, and the instinctive grace of girls passionately devoted to dancing. She must have been one of those.

The letter writer, after all this time of merely hoping she could come to New York, would, he saw by the itinerary, be here now. Not a great thing, she knew, by his standards, but something she had long dreamed of; simply to leave her cares and responsibilities behind for a few days and go to the theatre and shop foolishly, and spend more money than she could afford.

How good it would be to see him again. She so hoped to see a few old friends, and reminisce, and catch up. She knew how busy he was, but still she could not help hoping. Actually, he saw by his calendar, he *was* rather busy this week; but there might, between appointments, be a little time. At worst, seeing her could be awful, but no more awful than so many other things; yet it could also be much better. If she insisted upon an illusion, he might be of some small assistance.

He telephoned her hotel. It was an expensive hotel near Central Park. Her voice sounded sleepy when she answered, but leapt instantly to life when he announced himself. "Bobby," she said, "I'm so glad you called. Oh, I'm so happy you called!"

"I hoped I didn't get you up. The trip must have been tiring."

"Well," she said, "I confess I had dozed off for just a minute. Worn out with the excitement of it. Oh, what a city! What a miracle!"

"Then let me call you back later. I'm sorry."

"Nonsense, silly," she said. "I didn't come here to doze off. And how do I know you'll call back? Now that I have you, I'm not going to let you go. Does that sound brazen? Well, I don't care if it does. What do you think of that?"

They agreed to have dinner together.

When she appeared in the lobby of the hotel, he knew it was she only because it had to be, so nearly perfectly did she conform to his expectation. She came towards him moving quickly, with a girl's awkward grace—fair, smiling, candid. The last few paces she ran charmingly as if to embrace him, but she stopped just short and, instead, placed her hands on his shoulders and turned her cheek for kissing. So perfectly had her movements been executed, he thought they might have been studied.

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When he had kissed her, she steppped back to arm's length, her hands still on his shoulders, and gazed laughingly into his face. "You haven't changed. You haven't changed at all," she exclaimed happily. "Of course, you look a trifle thin," she said in smiling reproach, "but who wouldn't be?"

He could not recall ever having seen her face before.

In the taxi she said again how miraculous the city was. She pointed to a famous shop, a famous restaurant. "There!" she exclaimed. "And there. They're really there." Her voice was marvellous, a singer's voice.

"Yes," he said, "and nightmarishly expensive."

"Oh," she reproached herself, "how boring this must be for you. How provincial."

He assured her nothing could be further from the truth.

"I once lived here," she said. "Did you know that? Well, for a summer only, and if you could call it living. It was before you came here, as long ago as that. Before I was married. I was engaged, and not sure. That old story. In the old days, the young lady was sent abroad so that she would know her heart." She laughed. "I lived in a hotel for young ladies striving to know their hearts. Aspiring young actressess dreaming of splendour. *You* know. Lunch in a sandwich shop. Dinner in small, inexpensive French restaurants. By the time the summer was over, I was deliriously eager to go home, if you can believe it." She laughed again. "The old home town looked like paradise. I was married before I could unpack my bags."

The cab stopped in front of a restaurant he could not afford. When they had taken their table and ordered drinks, she said, "Do you know, I wasn't expecting your call just then. I thought it was the desk. But I knew your voice immediately, even before you said your name. Even after all these years, I knew your voice immediately."

"You must have been half expecting my call."

"No, really, I don't want you to think that. I don't mean anything telepathic and I'm not claiming womanly intuition. I just knew, I don't know how. Possibly because I wanted you so much to call."

"I recognised yours," he said. "Of course, I had the advantage of being the caller, but seriously, I'm sure I would have recognised yours."

"That's a terribly nice lie," she said, smiling. "But it is sweet of you to say, dear man."

"I quite mean it," he said. "It's astonishing how little you've changed. Not at all, save for the better." He took in her hair,

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her eyes, her throat, her lips, her eyes again. "Perhaps your voice is a touch deeper, a touch darker. More than that I will not concede."

"People do say that of me. Isn't it weird how little we change? All those years. Ugh!" She shuddered delightfully. "Then, suddenly, all at once—wham! It's all gone; all changed. Dear God!"

"Not always," he said. "Not always, by any means. The professional beauties, yes, and it's hideous to watch. I see it all the time. Positively ghoulish. And sad. With others, no. Quite the opposite. The fresh, natural quality, a kind of spontaneous, inevitable beauty—no, that doesn't change. Oh, of course it *changes*. All things in nature change. Or it doesn't so much change as alter. Deepen. With a kind of superb inevitability. I don't see *that* all the time, I assure you, but I see it now. There is nothing lovelier in nature."

She blushed and did interesting things with her eyes. He thought her surprisingly accomplished. The effect had been exquisite, a precise balance of embarrassment and pleasure. The merest touch more would have been excessive, ruinous; but she had sustained the balance with absolute grace.

"You see a lot of both kinds, don't you?" she asked. "This is a city full of beautiful women, especially in your profession."

"An illusion," he said. "A sordid illusion, entirely manufactured. Lights, make-up, surgical intervention. A transitory magic. I speak now not of magic, but of the real, the terrifyingly authentic: a woman, not a mannequin. In a word, yourself."

"Another gracious lie. That's terribly charitable of you. It's so much nicer than the mere truth. Truth," she said and laughed, "what a bore."

He ordered another round of drinks.

"I shouldn't. Really, I shouldn't," she said. "It would be dreadfully embarrassing if you had to carry my sleeping form home. What would the receptionist think?"

He thought her a thoroughly attractive woman in her own way. He regretted not having known her *then*.

She smiled conspiratorially. "Don't tell me. I know perfectly well what you're thinking. You're remembering that time I passed out, most indecorously, on you boys. Admit it. Admit that's what you're thinking."

He laughed. "I admit it."

"Shocking. Most unladylike. I was so embarrassed next day I could have died. I wanted to hide. I *did* hide. I wouldn't even answer the phone all that day and the next. Mostly, I confess,

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I felt awful because you were there to see the whole grotesque debacle. My unlovely fall from gace."

"I thought it charming. I was deeply touched. I've never seen it done so well. In or out of the theatre."

"Now *there's* a tremendous, thundering lie."

"I shall not protest that," he said. "I shall merely assert it again. You lay there like a dying princess—a little pale, to be sure, but of a regal pallor and all the lovelier for that."

"Pale! Green, rather. I must have looked like death itself. I certainly did the next morning, and all that day. The next day I went on to a sort of bluey-grey. And I thought of all those people looking on at my disgrace, those millions of people—but all I could really care about was how thoroughly revolted you must have felt."

"I felt honoured, even at this remove. Guilty too, that I should have added to your distress." He put his hand over hers briefly, no more than touched her in emphasis. "And now, on that mirthless note, would you like one more drink before we go on to coarser substance?"

"No, thank you so very, very kindly, dear sir, but on that mirthless note I can feel all the symptoms returning."

He ordered their meal.

"The truth," she said, "the truth is you probably didn't notice me at all. You were much too occupied with that girl to notice anything else. I think that's the reason why I drank too much that evening."

"That's unfair," he said. "And worlds away from the truth. The truth—if you really want to know the truth—is that I'd come alone to the party in the hope that you might notice me."

"Oh, now, really," she said. "Please don't tell me you weren't with that girl. You were always with that girl."

"You really were in a bad way that night. I was seeing a lot of her those days. What was I to do? You never so much as looked at me except to look through me. I came alone that night, hoping that it might, at last, be the night. Instead, you passed out on me."

"Passed out on *you*!" She seemed truly appalled.

"In my arms," he said. "I caught you. Or held you, anyway."

"You were at the other end of the room. Of that immense room," she said.

"But I was watching you. I won't say spying on you, though, Lord knows, my rheumy eyes sought you out often enough."

"Up to what point in the evening? Ask yourself that," she said.

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"You don't remember our long and rather wild talk that night?"

"No, no. I'm sure I don't." Her eyes shone with pleasure.

"None of it?" He thought her smile enigmatic.

"No. I can't recall that we talked at all."

"I'm glad," he said. "I kept expecting to hear from you the next day, and the next, and all that week. Not a word, as you know. Then when we met again—crossed paths, I should say, for we didn't really meet, did we?—I waited for a look, a sign, a word of recognition from you. I mean some unmistakable token that something had passed between us. There was none. That's why I say I'm happy you don't remember. I thought then, and I've believed ever since, that you didn't *want* to remember, that you *chose* to forget. I'm grateful I was mistaken."

"Please believe me," she said with a rush of feeling. "I don't remember a thing. Not a word. Nothing. Only feeling more and more remote. Then seeing the floor tilt, and dreading being sick in front of all those people. Dreading most of all your seeing me wretched and sick and disgusting. And all the while you were right beside me." Her manner was suffused with regret.

"Holding your hand."

"What did we talk about?"

"It wasn't so much what we said. It was the quality, the feeling, the music rather than the words. Young and wild, sort of crazy, exhilarated with a sense of discovery, a little melancholy that we'd not come to it sooner. There we were, all of twenty and acting as though it were one hour before the final stroke of the clock. You know, you cried."

"I hope it wasn't the whisky. *Vin triste.*"

He looked at her closely. She had fallen in so perfectly with the tone and rhythm of his creation that, for a moment, he had the uncanny sensation she had led him into a kind of collaboration, the making of a myth out of a void. But her face registered none of it, nothing but the sweetest melancholy.

A little warily, he replied, "That's what I feared it might be. The sadness in the wine."

"It wasn't," she said. "Or at least it wasn't only that. I'm sure of it."

"I believe that. I want terribly to believe that, but I believe it apart from my wanting to."

She asked shyly, "What were some of the words?"

"Oh, you can imagine them. Fond reproaches. Questions, mostly. Why? Why? Why? Why?"

"Yes," she said, "I can imagine. But why didn't you call? Why

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didn't you make the sign, say the word? Why did you let it go?"

I might have said that, in precisely that way, he thought. "Still why? why? why?" he said, smiling plaintively. "Put yourself in my place, if you can. If a gentleman believed a lady would prefer not to remember, wouldn't it have been churlish of him to compel her to?"

"Oh, lord," she said. "Had you only— But we can't mourn what's past. Still, later, had you only written. There was still time."

"Time," he said ruefully. "Time. Write? I started a hundred letters. I wrote after my marriage . . . dissolved . . . but I couldn't send it. Why? Because it was less a letter than a cry of distress, a call for help. That would have been hideous. The only decent thing I've ever done in my life, I sometimes think, was *not* to post that letter."

"I was such a silly child," she said, "with all those frightfully respectable ideas about proper litttle misses not being forward. So little passed between us—I mean in the tangible, obvious sense. Hardly a word. I can't think of any actual exchanges of words, yet it didn't seem to matter."

Now he was certain of their collaboration. "Yes," he said. "It's as though we were always separated by immense rooms and the high walls of other people. And yet, somehow, it did not seem to matter." His voice ended on a dying fall.

"Two people can move in different orbits," she said, "and yet their stars can cross. Even across those rooms and those walls, I felt a special affinity. Despite everything—perhaps even because of everything—we were *en rapport*."

Wonderful! he thought. The cadences; the pauses. As much as the words themselves, she handled the silences beautifully.

They decided against dessert, though he tried to persuade her. They drank Turkish coffee out of tiny cups and smiled across the table at each other.

"So there we were then," he said. "And here we are now."

He pointed out a much publicised heiress at a nearby table. The woman had been drinking and was talking in a loud voice to a dark-haired boy who looked embarrassed.

He smiled again, and spoke with a flourish. "It is, you have my word for it, with fear and trembling that I allude to a most delicate matter. Can I persuade you to have a final drink? A highball? A cordial? Perhaps a cognac?"

She laughed and touched his hand. "You'll think this terribly wicked of me, I know. What *won't* you think of me! I have an excellent, a very special brandy standing on a table in my room,

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still in its wrapping. At your service, sir." She made a little curtsey by dipping her head and shoulders. He signalled the waiter for the bill.

"A glass," he said, "to what might have been."

"To what may be," she murmured.

Splendid! he thought. She was no tragic heroine, but who, these days, was? Incredibly, she was his double. Who would have expected it from the lady who had written that breathless letter? But—he saw in retrospect—even that had been cunningly calculated. Truly admirable. Slightly sinister as well, but in the nicest way. They smiled at each other in mutal recognition. Words would have been superfluous.

She rose and turned towards him choreographically in a flow of movement, exactly in time to catch upon her shoulders the coat he held for her, as if they had rehearsed the gesture to the pitch of perfection. He very nearly praised her, but checked himself.

They smiled in a silent assent which words could only violate, and swept from the room with a sense of absolute inevitability, to the destiny they had together wrought.

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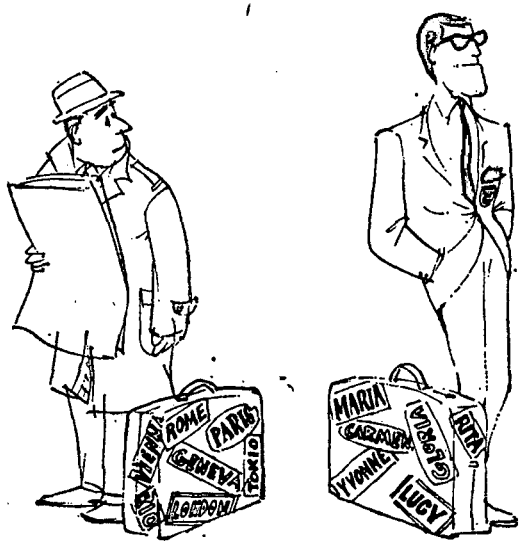

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THE MEMORY OF HIS BROTHER FELL LIKE A SHADOW ACROSS THE WHOLE OF HIS LIFE

DEATH OF A HERO

BY MARY GAGE

HERE's my cottage. I say "my" cottage, although I never live there—wouldn't dream of it. Don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't like the cottage, or this place. I just prefer Oslo.

I expect you think, like the rest of the family, that as I am the only son after Nicolai, I should run the estate. But *why* should I? My sister Ellen lives in the big house: she runs it as well as any man. It's not surprising—she lived a man's life in the war, with Nicolai. She fought in the Resistance as strongly as he, and even now she walks ten miles in the forest before breakfast, without feeling tired. Look at her; long and lean and fair—she *is* a man. I agree it's tough for her to be stuck out here while her husband runs a shipping line on the coast, but she thrives on hardship, I promise you.

She blames me though; they all do. I am the little brother, the one who should have taken over after Nicolai's death. I should be married now, with sons. They watch me in Oslo, the whole pack of them—"Little Jacob, who was too young to fight in the war is over forty now," they say. "Why can't he marry and take on the work that Nicolai left?"

I will do as I choose, I tell you. I will spend my money like water if it pleases me. I will lead my own life, do you understand? You must think I'm hard on my family, but that's not true. And they don't waste any spare kindness on me. When I think of them like this, I'm amazed at the mess they're all in. Sometimes, I think the whole lot is doomed: other times I think

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that any family is probably the same. I mean, if you knew the hidden secrets of any family, you would quietly go away and wash your hands of the whole human race.

It is dusk now; let's go back to the house, where we can at least be comfortable. There is a fire and plenty of whisky to speed the slow setting of our sun.

I will tell you about Nicolai . . . These are fine glasses, are they not?—solid in the hand. When I sit here alone of an evening, I can be well content, so long as I have my whisky.

To understand Nicolai's death, I must remind you that we were continually surrounded by German soldiers. We were in the dower house and the officers were quartered in the house, over a dozen of them. I can see their vehicles in the courtyard now, hear the ring of their boots on the cobblestones. They were always polite to us, but nevertheless, they were always there; and the strain on Ellen and Nicolai, working towards the death of their constant companions, must have been crushing.

It was really worse for Nicolai. Ellen did the cooking and ran the house, but Nicolai had nothing to do all day but think, sit around and think at home or in the forest. I think his anxieties preyed on his mind towards the end, because it showed on his face. Such a muscular man could never become thin, but he had the cheek hollows of a priest. He spoke little, and would arrive unexpectedly to sit idle before the fire for hours at a time with my mother and me. He only talked directly to me once, one evening, just before his death.

"Jacob," he said, "never let them see you are frightened. Be civil to the officers, and always do exactly as they tell you. That way, you should be safe, even if they get me." Then he took his gun and a minute later the front door shut quietly behind him. My mother never heard or saw him at all.

I was scared by the way Nicolai behaved. For the first time it became clear to me that he was in danger. I never believed before that the soldiers would get him; guerilla war always favours the locals. Besides, in our own home he had always been invincible to me. My father died young, and Nicolai had taught me to shoot and fish. He did all those things better than I ever shall. I never saw him ill-at-ease in my life, and to see him actually frightened terrified me. Yes, that was it, he was frightened that evening; his nerve had gone.

The soldiers arrived during supper. I suppose I had been waiting for them because I heard their boots on the cobbles before my mother, and dropped my fork waiting for them to come in.

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They often walked past the dower house, but this time I knew they would come in, and they did. By the time they banged at the door, the backs of my knees were clammy with sweat.

"We are sorry to disturb you," said the neat young German, his companion silent at the door. "But we wanted a word with Herr Nicolai, and cannot find him. Could you say where he has gone?"

My mother glanced at me, and put her glass down on the table. "I have not set eyes on him all day," she answered.

"Strange," said the young German in an even tone. "My companion watched him come in here half an hour ago."

"I never saw him," repeated my mother.

"And you?" The German's eyes, interested, detached, shifted to mine. I felt my mouth open and close. Already I was lost. The man could see my thoughts on my face. I did not know what to reply, and then, at once, Nicolai's face swam into my confused thoughts—*Be civil to the officers, and always do exactly as they tell you* . . .

"Yes, I saw him, but he has gone."

"Where?"

"I do not know where. He went into the forest."

"And what do you suppose he went into the forest to do?" asked the officer, mildly interested, his eyes fixed on me.

Suddenly, I didn't care for this man, or his shadowy companion standing in the doorway, on our property, interrogating me like a criminal. Coolly I replied, "I expect he went shooting. When there is nothing to do, you can always go and hunt something."

"Which way did he go?"

"I do not know. How should I know? It was dark. I have told you all I can."

When the soldiers left I was astonished that I burst into tears. My mother came and stood by me, not touching me. "Did I do wrong to say I saw him?" I stuttered and blubbed like a baby. "I did wrong to send them after him, didn't I, Mother?"

"Nonsense, my Jacob. They will never find him in all those acres of forest. You did right to tell them. Otherwise they might have tried to search the house."

. . . I am telling you the story too fast, my friend. Have another whisky. Join me: I will certainly drink another. After all these years of living with one evening, the events telescope. You remember the climax, and looking back, it seems as though all the events in the evening were overshadowed by that climax. In fact, it was probably not so at all. Possibly my mother and I talked

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of many things . . . our minds wandered . . . we may have remarked on the soft evening, or the coming summer. But looking back, was it half an hour we waited, or four hours? It might have been a century. The fire burned low, and we sat together in the shadowy candlelight, wishing Nicolai speed through the forest.

At last came an urgent tapping at the door. We sprang up, uncertain what to do.

"My God, it is the Germans; they have him!" said my mother, snatching her candle. "What shall we do? We must let them in."

It was Nicolai. He fell panting into my mother's arms the moment she unbarred the door. His face was streaked with dirt or blood.

"Bar the door, Jacob!" ordered my mother, sounding more like Ellen than I had ever heard her. "Bring milk here!"

I did as I was told. When I returned, Nicolai was slumped in a chair by the fire, breathing heavily. He was conscious, but he was afraid, and his eyes flickered from shadow to shadow in the firelight as he talked.

"The ambush worked—we got their supplies as they went over the bridge by the iron works. We scattered to return home, but I had not gone ten yards when a shot was fired very close. It cracked through the forest, ricocheting off the trees. At first I thought one of us had gone trigger-happy. I almost told him to shut up and beat it, when another shot came and another, screaming past me. My God, I moved quickly and quietly. I ran in a circle. I thought I had got away, when suddenly a beam of light shone straight in my face. 'Herr Nicolai!' shouted a German voice, and there I was, lit up, like a sitting pigeon.

"There was only one thing to do. I shot straight up the torch beam, quick as a flash. I must have got him, because there was a cry and the light fell from his hand. It shone upwards, stabbing a shaft of light through the pine branches into the night. Then I ran like a hare. Shots followed me, but what hope had they in pitch darkness?"

"You are safe, my son, you are safe," crooned my mother, stroking his forehead in the firelight. "You are not wounded are you?"

"No, but don't you see it is worse than that! They saw me," Nicolai said. "And I have killed one German in front of others. They suspected me for a long time. Now they know. I'm a dead man, and if I escape, they will punish you all for helping me. My God, what am I to do?" He pushed my mother away, his face hideous with earth and scratches and fear.

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"We will hide you in the loft," said my mother, not listening to him, making her own plans to safeguard her young.

"If I escape, you all die," Nicolai told her.

"Don't talk like that!" my mother ordered. "They would never kill us all. Surely you are not afraid? Come with me."

She took Nicolai by the arm and led him upstairs. He was still breathing heavily from fear and exhaustion. While she was gone, I brushed the mud from the chair and straightened the covers. I saw that Nicolai had not drunk his milk. All the while I heard the soldiers' boots ringing across the yard, but still they did not come.

When my mother came down she was pale but calm. "I forgot to give him his milk," I said, and at that moment we heard the heavy boots.

"Take it up to him now," said my mother on an impulse. I suppose she wanted me out of the room when the soldiers came. Thrusting a candle into one hand and the milk into the other, she pushed me towards the stairs. "Quick," she ordered, "get it to him before they come. He may not have a chance to drink again for some time."

But he never drank the milk. For now I am going to tell you something that I have never told the rest of the family, simply because it will not affect you in the least. My brother killed himself.

When I lifted the hay-loft door, my guttering candle lit up a scene which I can never forget in my deepest sleep or the gayest afternoon. I entered the loft at the moment of his suicide, and my candle threw a giant shadow of Nicolai's hand on the trigger on to the loft wall. The gun was against his temple. Against the vast shadow-play of the hand, the gun, the head, Nicolai himself seemed like a glove puppet as he fell to the loft floor.

The strange thing is, my friend, that I cannot remember the sound of the gun. Of course he had a silencer—that is how my mother never knew. But I should have heard something. Yet in all the times I have relived that scene, I have not heard the slightest click. It all happens in my memory in silence, almost in slow motion. Nicolai rolls on to the loft floor, he turns over, the gun falls from his fingers. I hold my candle up to see his face. It does not look like Nicolai's face, because it is afraid, and in pain, and somehow so small and still after the shadow. Only the blood moves, coursing black in the candlelight down his forehead.

Quite calmly, because one does become calm in moments of great crisis, I listened to the voices of Germans, arguing with

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my mother, the bang of a door. I put the milk down by Nicolai, as close to his hand as I could, and I picked up my candle to go downstairs, shutting the loft door behind me. Halfway down the soldiers passed me.

"What have you been up to?" demanded one, shoving past me, but I did not have the patience to reply. I felt very old and tired, and I did not want to look at my mother.

Luckily there was no need. She was sitting downstairs with her head in her hands, as though she knew what had happened. She did not look up when I came in.

The hatch upstairs was moved back; there was silence, some shouting, then a voice said, "There he is, we've got him!" Then silence again.

They carried my brother downstairs like a carcass and took him away, leaving blood on the carpet. We never saw him again, to give him a decent burial.

. . . I can tell you all this quite coolly, my friend, because I have been over it so many times that I have wrung the feeling out of the story. It simply happened: that is all. The rest is simple: quite predictable. My mother assumed that the Germans shot Nicolai. She may have suspected his suicide—the Germans assured her that they found him dead—but she never asked me if it was true. She closed her mind to other possibilities. Poor Mother: she was killed by the shock of Nicolai's death, and I do not like to think of her too much.

For Mother Nicolai was killed by the Germans: for Ellen, too. We were moved out of the dower house into the big house, and Ellen shut and locked the door for the last time. The place is now a fossil of the war and of memories.

After Nicolai's death, Ellen worked harder for the Resistance than anyone worked for anything. She did Nicolai's job, and her own too, and she ran the house for the officers so that no one could find any fault. She is strong, is Ellen, and Nicolai became her saint. Could you wonder that when she finally married, she married a man not for his wealth, or his name, but for his war record?

And I? I am blamed by the whole family, because I remember Nicolai as he was. You see, I care greatly for honesty, however unpalatable. I know Nicolai was not murdered by the Germans. He was no more a hero than I am. And to me, he does not have to be a hero: it is a great comfort to me to think that he chose to kill himself rather than let others do it. It was the easy way out: I would have done it myself. And that is why I feel that I am very much more like Nicolai than the others know. He chose

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what to do with his life: I have chosen what to do with mine. In the end, he abdicated his responsibilities by shooting himself: I will never take them up.

After the war, I was the only son and was given the best education that money could buy. Ellen sent me off to Harvard to study estate management. I repaid her by crossing the world, not to study, but to represent Harvard on the ski-slopes. Estate management bored me: it still does. Degrees are for people who must live off their brains—why should I rob them of their livelihood? And then, after Harvard, back home, but now home was Oslo. Oslo is a perfect city. It has everything in a place with less than a million people. There is always a party on, girls, plenty to drink, noise, comfort. Oslo suits me.

Thank you for letting me talk myself out. You and the whisky together have made everything clear to me. The myth of my brother threatens me whenever I return here: now I see it to be ridiculous. Why do we keep that locked shrine to a false god in the dower house after all this time? Perhaps I will assume just enough of that responsibility they try to burden me with, to take the key, and throw open the doors and windows, even in the hay loft, so that a little light may cleanse a generation of shadow. Yes, that is an attractive idea! We will do it together, you and I. I remember the dower house well. It always appealed to me: I would like to go in again.

But first I hope you will join me in another whisky? We can think about the idea . . . see if we find it attractive by the end of the bottle. I always say that if the first three taste good, the fourth always tastes better . . .

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (OCTOBER ISSUE)

Across. 1 & 6, *Drove to the wall.* 10, *Bacon.* 11, *Leicester.* 12, *Resident.* 13, *Excel.* 15, *Natural.* 17, *Drink in.* 19, *Examine.* 21, *Beggars.* 22, *Lynch.* 24, *Clueless.* 27, *Narrators.* 28, *Races.* 29, *Soar.* 30, *Heedlessly.*

Down. 1, *Dubs.* 2, *Orchestra.* 3, *Ennui.* 4, *Oil-well.* 5, *Hoisted.* 7, *Attic.* 8, *Lordliness.* 9, *Severing.* 14, *Underlines.* 16, *Railhead.* 18, *Knapsacks.* 20, *Enclose.* 21, *Bruised.* 23, *Norma.* 25, *Large.* 26, *Espy.*

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SHABOS NAHAMU

From the pen of one of Russia's greatest story-tellers, a long-lost tale translated for the first time into English. The title is Hebrew for "Sabbath of Comfort", on which the rabbi consoles the congregation of the synagogue by reading cheerful passages from the Prophets

BY ISAAC BABEL

THE morning goes by, the evening comes—and it's the fifth day of the week. Another morning goes by, the evening comes—and it's the sixth day. On the sixth day, on Friday, you have to pray. When you've prayed, you take a stroll through the *shtetl* in your best hat and then come back home for supper. When he gets home, a good Jew has a glass of vodka—neither God nor the Talmud says he can't have two—and eats his *gefilte* fish and his *kugel* with currants. After supper he feels good. He tells stories to his wife; then he goes to sleep with one eye closed and his mouth open. He sleeps, but his wife in the kitchen hears music, as though the blind fiddler had come from the *shtetl* and was standing under the window playing.

That's how it is with every Jew. But Hershele was different from other Jews. No wonder he was famous in all of Ostropole, in all of Berdichev, and in all of Vilyuisk. Hershele celebrated only one Friday in six. On the others he sat with his family in the darkness and cold. His children cried, and his wife gave him hell. Each reproach was as heavy as a cobblestone. Hershele used to answer back in verse.

Once, so the story goes, Hershele thought he would look ahead a little. He went off to the fair on Wednesday to earn some money for Friday. Where there's a fair you'll find a *pan*, and where there's a *pan* you'll find ten Jews. But you'd be lucky to earn three pennies from ten Jews. They all listened to Hershele's funny stories, but when it was time to pay, they weren't around any more. Hershele went back home with a belly as empty as a wind instrument.

"What did you earn?" his wife asked.

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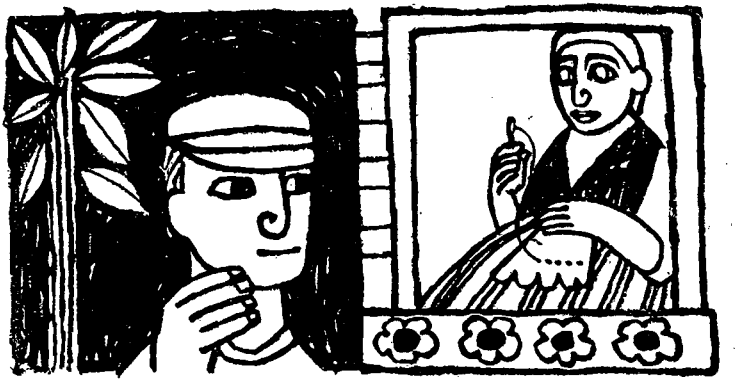

"I earned life everlasting," he said. "Both the rich and the poor promised it to me."

Hershele's wife had only ten fingers. She bent them back one by one. Her voice was like thunder in the mountains. "Every other wife has a husband like everybody else's. But I have a husband who feeds his wife on funny stories. May God take away the use of his tongue, and his hands, and his feet in the New Year."

"Amen," Hershele said.

"In everybody else's windows the candles burn like they'd set fire to oak trees in the house, but I have candles as thin as matches, and there's so much smoke from them it shoots up to heaven. Everybody else has white bread, but all my husband brings me is firewood as wet as newly-washed hair—"

Hershele said not a single word in reply. Why add fuel to the flames when they're burning so brightly as it is? That's point number one. And then, point number two, what can you say to a cantankerous wife when she's right?

When she got tired of shouting, Hershele went and lay down on his bed and thought, Maybe I should go and see Rabbi Boruhl. (Everybody knew that Rabbi Boruhl suffered from black melancholia and that only Hershele with his talk could make him feel better.) Maybe I should go to Rabbi Boruhl. It's true the *tsadik's* servants give me only bones and keep the meat for themselves. Meat is better than bones, but bones are better than air. I'll go to Rabbi Boruhl.

Hershele got up and went out to harness his mare. She gave him a stern and sad look.

"It's all very well, Hershele," her eyes said, "you didn't give

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me any oats yesterday, you didn't give me any oats the day before yesterday, and I didn't get anything today, either. If you don't give me any oats tomorrow, I'll have to start thinking about whether I'm going to live."

Hershele flinched before her searching look, lowered his eyes, and stroked her soft lips. Then he sighed so loud that the mare understood everything, and he said: "I'll go to Rabbi Boruhl on foot."

When Hershele set off, the sun was high in the sky. The sweltering road ran on ahead. Carts drawn by white oxen and piled with sweet-smelling hay lumbered slowly along. Peasants sat on these high carts, dangling their legs and swishing their long whips. The sky was dark blue, and the whips were black. When he'd gone about five miles, Hershele reached a forest. The sun was already leaving its place in the sky, which was ablaze with gentle fires. Barefoot girls were bringing the cows in from the fields. The cows' pink udders, heavy with milk, swayed to and fro.

The forest met Hershele with cool shade and soft twilight. Green leaves bent over and stroked each other with their flat hands, whispered together faintly up there in the tree-tops, and then fell back, rustling and quivering, into their places. Hershele did not hear their whispering. The orchestra playing in his belly was as big as anything hired by Count Potocki for a gala evening.

He still had a long way to go. Dusk was hurrying in from the edges of the earth, closing in over Hershele's head, and spreading out across the world. Unblinking lamps lit in the sky, and the earth fell silent.

It was night when Hershele arrived at an inn. A light was burning in a small window. Zelda, the landlady, was sitting in her warm room by this window, sewing baby clothes. Her belly was so big it looked as if she were going to have triplets. Hershele looked at her small red face with its light-blue eyes and wished her good evening. "Can I stop here and rest for a while, ma'am?"

"Certainly."

Hershele sat down. His nostrils heaved like a pair of blacksmith's bellows. There was a red-hot fire blazing in the stove. Water was boiling in a large cauldron and frothing over snow-white dumplings. A fat chicken was bobbing up and down in a golden broth. There was a smell of *kugel* from the oven. Hershele sat on a bench writhing like a woman in labour. More

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plans were hatching in his head at that moment than King Solomon ever had wives. It was quiet in the room, the water was boiling, and the chicken tossed and pitched on its golden waves.

"Where is your husband, ma'am?" Hershele asked.

"My husband has gone to the *pan* to pay his rent," she said, and paused. Her childlike eyes grew round and large. Suddenly she went on: "And I am sitting here at the window thinking. I would like to ask you a question. I suppose you travel up and down the world, and you've been to the *Heder*, and you know about our Jewish ways. But nobody ever taught me anything. Tell me: will *shabos nahamu* be coming soon?"

Oho, thought Hershele, a very good question indeed. All kinds of potatoes grow in God's garden.

"I'm asking because my husband promised me that when *shabos nahamu* comes, we'll go and visit my mother. And I'll buy you a dress, he says, and a new wig, and we'll go to Rabbi Motalemi to ask him for a son to be born to us instead of a daughter. But that will only be when *shabos nahamu* comes. I suppose he's a man from the other world, this *shabos nahamu*?"

"You are quite right, ma'am," Hershele replied. "God himself put those words into your mouth. You will have both a son and a daughter. I am *shabos nahamu*, ma'am."

The baby clothes slipped from Zelda's knees. She got up and bumped her head on a rafter, because she was tall, Zelda was, and plump and red and young. Her high breasts looked like two bags tightly packed with grain. Her light-blue eyes opened wide like a child's.

"I am *shabos nahamu*," Hershele repeated. "For two months now I've been doing my rounds, helping people. It's a long journey from heaven down to earth. My shoes are all worn out. I bring you greetings from all your people up there."

"From Aunt Pesya?" Zelda shouted, "and from Father, and from Aunt Golda? You know them?"

"Who doesn't know them?" Hershele said. "I often talk with them just like I'm talking with you now."

"How are they getting on up there?" Zelda asked, clasping her trembling hands on her belly.

"Not too well," Hershele replied sadly. "What sort of life do you think it is for a dead person? There isn't much fun up there."

Zelda's eyes filled with tears.

"They're cold," Hershele went on, "and hungry. They eat the same as angels, you see. They're not supposed to eat more than the angels. And how much do angels eat? They're quite happy

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with a drink of water. You wouldn't get a glass of vodka up there once in a hundred years."

"Poor Father," Zelda whispered, quite shaken.

"At Passover you get a *latke*, and one *blintze* has to last you twenty-four hours."

"Poor Aunt Pesya," Zelda shuddered.

"I have to go hungry myself," Hershele continued, and turned his face away as a tear rolled down his nose and fell into his beard. "There's nothing I can do about it, you see: up there I'm treated like everybody else—"

Hershele didn't manage to get any further. With a patter of her large feet she bore down on him with plates, bowls, glasses and bottles. When Hershele began to eat, she saw that he really was a man from the other world.

To start with, Hershele had chicken liver garnished with fat and chopped onion. He drank it down with a glass of high-class vodka flavoured with orange peel. Then he had fish, mashing soft boiled potatoes into the savoury sauce that went with it and putting half a jarful of red horseradish on the side of his plate, a horseradish at the mere sight of which five *pans* in all their finery would have wept tears of envy.

After the fish Hershele did his duty by the chicken and the broth with blobs of fat swimming in it. The dumplings, bathed in molten butter, jumped into Hershele's mouth like hares fleeing from a hunter. We don't have to say anything about what happened to the *kugel*. What do you think happened to it, if you consider that Hershele sometimes never saw a *kugel* from one end of the year to the other?

When he had finished, Zelda got together all the things that she had decided to ask Hershele to take to the other world for Father, Aunt Pesya and Aunt Golda. For her father she put out a new *talas*, a bottle of cherry brandy, a jar of raspberry jam and a pouch full of tobacco. For Aunt Pesya she got out some warm grey socks, and for Aunt Golda an old wig, a large comb and a prayer book. Lastly, she gave Hershele a pair of boots, some *grebenes* and a silver coin.

"Give them our regards, Mister Shabos Nahamu, give them all our kind regards" were her parting words to Hershele as he set off with the heavy bundle. "Or would you like to wait a little until my husband comes back?"

"No," said Hershele. "I must be on my way. You don't think you're the only one I have to look after, do you?"

When he had gone about a mile, Hershele stopped to draw breath, threw the bundle down, sat on it, and took stock of the

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situation. "As you well know, Hershele," he said to himself, "the world is full of fools. The landlady in that inn was a fool. But perhaps her husband is not a fool, perhaps he has large fists, fat cheeks, and a long whip. If he comes home and chases after you in the forest, what then?"

Hershele wasted no time seeking an answer to this question. He immediately buried the bundle in the ground and marked the spot so that he would be able to find it again. Then he ran back the way he had come, stripped naked, put his arms around a tree, and began to wait. He did not have to wait long.

At dawn Hershele heard the crack of a whip, the smacking lips, and the thud of a horse's hooves. This was the innkeeper in hot pursuit of Mister Shabos Nahamu. When he reached the naked Hershele with his arms around a tree, the innkeeper stopped his horse and looked as silly as a monk on meeting the Devil.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I am a man from the other world," Hershele replied gloomily. "I have been robbed of important papers which I was taking to Rabbi Boruhl."

"I know who robbed you," shouted the innkeeper. "I have a bone to pick with him, too. Which way did he go?"

"I cannot tell you which way he went," Hershele whispered bitterly. "If you will lend me your horse I will soon catch up with him, while you wait for me here. Undress and stand by this tree. Hold it up and do not leave it until I return. It is a holy tree, and many things in our world depend on it."

Hershele only had to take one look at a man to see what he was made of. He had seen right away that the innkeeper was not much brighter than his wife. And sure enough, the innkeeper got undressed and stood by the tree. Hershele climbed on to the cart and drove back to where he had left the bundle. He dug it up and went on to the edge of the forest.

Here Hershele put the bundle back on his shoulder, left the horse and took the road which led to the house of the holy Rabbi Boruhl. It was morning already. The roosters were crowing with their eyes shut. The innkeeper's horse wearily plodded back with the empty cart to the place where she had left her master.

He was waiting for her, huddled against the tree, naked under the rays of the rising sun. He was cold, and he kept shifting from foot to foot.

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ISAAC BABEL, born of Jewish parents at Odessa in 1894, fought with the Red Army, and gained literary success in the 1920s. He died in 1941 in a concentration camp. Now recognised as a classic writer.

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ARGOSYPROFILE

Morris WEST

In his time this Australian has lived the different lives of a monk and a business man. Now he is a famous author whose novels are read around the world

BY ARTHUR POTTERSMAN

WHAT contemporary, millionaire writer of *faction*—that most modern, most profitable blend of fact with fiction—has had a life that compares with Morris West's?

Harold (*Carpetbaggers*) Robbins, perhaps—the orphan errand boy, who made and lost a million dollars by the time he was 20, speculating with sugar and other crops; who became a film company shipping clerk, then a £100-a-week-executive, and who is now a highly successful and efficient novelist.

Or Irving Wallace, the intellectual from Los Angeles, a magazine and film writer who wrote four unsuccessful novels before *The Chapman Report* exploded. This book put him on the map as a novelist who can command multi-hundred-thousand dollar film deals before the ink is even dry on the *synopses* of his plots.

I reckon that Morris West, a tall, bulky, bespectacled man from Melbourne, who keeps a distinct Aussie twang in his slow and careful speech, beats them all. West entered a monastery at 14; fought in the war on New Guinea a dozen years later; founded a successful radio company at 35; and now, just 50, is reputed to have earned one million pounds from his writings in the last

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ten years. I met him in London recently, up in a 14th floor suite at the Hilton Hotel.

"Having had success come," he says, "in one's middle 40s, you develop a certain balance about it. I never threw my cap over the windmill or did all sorts of crazy things.

"Remember, I'd already made my money once in business—and lost it again. The one thing money has done is given me the freedom to travel at will. We live extremely well, but I don't think we have any extravagances." The Wests are in Rome this year while he works on the film of *Shoes of the Fisherman,* his novel about an Ukrainian cardinal who is released from Siberia and elected Pope. After he has finished the research on a new book, he will return to the swimming and sailing of Sidney.

Son of immigrant Irish stock, he believes he chose monastery life when he was 14 "because I didn't have a very happy childhood. My parents were still alive at the time, and they left it up to me. My mother wasn't very happy, and the security and order of a monk's life attracted me."

Young Morris West joined the Irish Christian Brothers: "I was fortunate enough to be under men who were in the direct line of classic Irish scholarship. They knew their Greek and their Latin and their French.

He was a member of this teaching order for 12 years. He describes his education as "severely classical", and adds "the inhibitions of the life forced one towards self-expression. I wrote a lot, mostly literary criticism and annotation.

"I was primarily a Gallicist. I specialised in French literature. I loved and still love the precision of the French language and French thinking. Curiously enough, living in Italy and speaking Italian, one becomes aware of the rhetorical character of the life and language, as distinct from the French.

"My books translate better into French. Italian is a very circumlocutory tongue."

Can West detect effects produced in him by monastic life?

"It has given me a great respect for (a) logic and (b) language. The problem of language is that it is defective, but that we have to accept it as a perfect means of expression."

Like many really serious influences, the monastery produced a revolt in Morris West. He came back into the world at the age of 26, taught for three months, then joined the army. At this time, in a highly emotional state, he wrote his first published novel, *Moon in My Pocket,* which appeared under a pseudonym. He now says that it was a "very juvenile book".

Of his bewildering experiences on returning to the world after

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leaving the monastery, West comments, "It was all a shock to the system." He still remembers vividly being unable to knot a tie, or buy a train ticket, once he had shed his robes. He found it difficult to leave the monastery: "I had a sense of failure, or disorientation. Only later did I discover how good an education I had had. But I remained conscious of the human gaps."

"*Moon in My Pocket* was a revolt against that narrow Jansenist view of religious life, the belief that human nature is incapable of good, which was characteristic of much of the Irish attitude. It has had its effect on me, in that it made me a fighter for charity and justice and tolerance.

"It also led me"—here, I sensed, came a return to the language theme—"even as late as *The Ambassador* to find out grounds of agreement between people. I have always had a growing sense of the need for bridges." (*The Ambassador* was published in May 1965. The story was set in Vietnam and was concerned with an American diplomat torn between his conscience and his duties.)

Later in our two-hour conversation Morris West returned to this subject once more. Talking about the enormous mail he receives from his novels' readers all over the world, he said:

"Some of it is quite intimate. There's always the nut fringe, which of course I ignore. I become conscious of the terrible loneliness of people that drives them to write to you because of something they've read.

"The reading of a book, perhaps, is the most intimate means of communication there can be between one person and another. In the theatre there's always an audience, where one may be ashamed to cry and one cannot shout. With a book, one's thoughts and actions have free play that can range from obscenity to spirituality."

There are other ways in which his monastery life has affected Morris West—although he may not be completely conscious of them. These show through in his tendency towards the impersonal "one does this, one feels that"—and a strong liking for abstract nouns: charity, justice, tolerance, language as a means of expression . . . And these mannerisms and ways of thought became more marked as our talk continued.

He speaks little of his years in the monastery: "The routine is well-known—prayer, study, recreation in common. Community life became too exacting for an uncommunity type like myself."

Thanks to his linguistic proficiency, Morris West was commissioned as a specialist in cryptography in the army, running a chain of listening posts in the field, out of the main stream of

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army life. "I became a loner," he says. "I often regretted in later years that I did not go into an infantry battalion. It would have been of great help, probably have forced me to an earlier adjustment, spared me a great deal of pain."

Out of the army, he became for a while parliamentary secretary to William Morris Hughes, a former Australian Prime Minister. After six months West was fired, with the verdict that (he says) he'll always remember: "Well, West, you've got to go. I regret the necessity for this sudden parting, but for a moderately intelligent young man, you've done some —— silly things." Says West now: "In later years I have had no reason to quarrel with this verdict."

His immediate activity was to become publicity man to a radio station. This lasted a year. Then he went into writing and producing programmes. He founded his own company, and made quite a success of this—it lasted six years—until in 1951 came the crack-up.

"I had been quite seriously overworking and playing the young prodigy of the radio business. I had a nervous breakdown which left me very reduced in health for a while. After a year I turned freelance, but it was all weary, stale, flat and unprofitable. I sold out my interest in the radio station and decided to do what I realised I'd always wanted to do: be a novelist.

"To begin with I had a mental block. I felt I could never affront the sheer physical labour of such long connected work as was necessary to fill a book. Then came an income tax demand I could not meet—for about £2,000—and this was almost the catalyst. I sat down and wrote an adventure story in ten days, day and night." (This was *Gallows on the Sand*, a skin-diving cops-and-robbers yarn, set on the Barrier Reef.) "I sent it off to England and America, and an agent wrote back: 'It's obvious you can write, but this book is not yet mature enough for the American market. Let me see your next one'."

The book was published in the end by an Australian firm. From this and his next novel, *Kundu* (about a slave empire and native cults, derived from his days in New Guinea) Morris West probably earned little more than £1,000. But their real value to him went deeper than money.

"They were narrative exercises. They proved I could fulfill a given number of words. Work was no real problem. I was very disciplined, with a nine to five day, five days a week, a continuation of my old habits of study and so on."

Even now that he is beyond mere exercise, Morris West still feels amazed at his own craftsmanship: "I'm all right on the

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mechanics and the mental processes. I know where the bodies are buried. But the job seems harder each time I approach it, as if everything's new. Take a new book: the techniques that you've learned before don't apply to this situation."

With what money he made from *Kundu,* he took his wife and their one child to Sorrento. It was now that he met Father Borelli and his *scugnizzi,* the urchins of the Naples slums. The idea for what became Morris West's most famous book came from his wife, Joy. Mr. West explained: "I had never been in touch with Father Borelli before, but my wife came across a small reference to him and his boys in a book about Italy. She told me, 'There must be a fascinating story behind this man'. This was the prompting that West needed. He arranged to meet Father Borelli. "I was so enthralled when we did meet," he recalls, "that I said I would like to write about him, and asked for a guide to help me explore the slums." This, says West, "gave me a very real experience of life at its lowest level. It was my first total involvement in the brutal mechanics of living. In the army I was separate from that: I found a niche, and I stayed there. Now I sought out the experience, with a sense of need."

Morris West, with Father Borelli's help, did his research the hard way: "I gave myself out as a man embroiled with the police, that I had jumped ship because of a girl. I lived with them in the slums on and off for three months. I got sick quite often from bad food. It was a rough life—living in the ruins, paddling round the back street of Naples, sleeping out at night.

"You can only do that sort of thing once. I've learned other methods of research since, that take less toll."

You will see what West means when I tell you that the slums of Naples have justly been described as "the kingdom of the damned". There boys of five and six tout for the brothels with blasphemy on their lips and obscenity in their gestures. It is a city within a city, a city of despair where men are bought and women are sold and children are damned the moment they are begotten. To survive there, the *scugnizzi*—this Italian word for the slum children means spinning tops—steal money from church poor boxes to buy bread, peddle contraband cigarettes, beg and whine and sleep in doorways. They have to know that every woman is a whore, every man a thief, every policeman a sadist, and every priest a liar.

Father Borelli had lived and survived in the slums himself to gain the children's confidence. Then he could start to make a home for perhaps 100 of them, where they could eat and sleep and learn to read and write, and become human.

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All this Morris West captured in *Children of the Sun,* published in 1957. Then he wrote *Devil's Advocate* which tells about the unofficial will of an unrecognised saint, partly as a result of working around the Vatican as a journalist. The big books that have followed were *Shoes of The Fisherman*—which was published just one week before Pope John died, a savage personal blow to devoutly Catholic West—and *The Ambassador.*

When Morris West goes researching now, it's with a little more calculation and less impulse. "Basically there's no mystery. You go to a place, get an ear for the dialogue, a sense of the drama. You do much of the research before you get there."

In his research for *The Ambassador,* his novel set in Vietnam, West had an added advantage: on one visit to Saigon he acted as a contact man, carrying messages between the Americans, a foreign ambassador and the late President Diem.

What lies behind his writing—the big tales of tormented diplomats and worried cardinals? Says West: "I try to write of the dilemmas of living, the mysteries of living. The tears of things, if you want. Having explored them in my own life, I am trying to record the exploration. If that sounds pretentious, it isn't meant to.

"Twentieth-century men must make some effort to rationalise a crazy world—or they'll blow their brains out, or go on a permanent drunk.

"When the tumult and the shouting dies, the most I will have been able to have done is, *exert an influence.* I have learned never to expect historic results, visible results. One is conscious of exerting an influence on people's atitudes and thoughts. What it is one cannot define, but in my case, at least, one begins to feel responsible for what one writes."

Is religion Morris West's main driving force?

"Basically, what every man does with his life is a result of what sort of conscience he has. Outside the lunatic fringe every person has some kind of a conscience: libertarian or puritan, a formed set of opinions about what is right and wrong.

"This dominates his attitude to living: this produces"—and Morris West banged his hands together for emphasis—"a clash of people, this clash of personal consciences. At its lowest level, one man says you shouldn't sleep with your neighbour's wife; the other says, my neighbour's wife is unhappy, and wants sex, so I'll give her sex.

"There's the" (he hand-banged, instead of speaking) "of conscience. Not merely the people—the people and their views."

Does Morris West see himself as a Catholic novelist, as the

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religious themes of his books, the way of speaking in parables, even the "God love you, darling" farewell to his wife on the telephone during our interview, all seem to suggest?

"That least of all. And I never regard myself as a literary man, probably because I'm living away most of the time from what one might call the cult of literature—dinners and things."

Does he think the critics understand him?

"No author is ever very happy with the critics who disagree with him. I don't think it touches him very deeply. A certain category of critic you take seriously, another category you do not. Naturally, you like everyone to love you."

What keeps him writing?

"Unanswered questions. I have a constant and tremendous interest in what is going on. I've tried to analyse this: I think the reason is that I have been separated from the world for a considerable part of my life when normally one is pretty embroiled. Also I have a late family"—he has four children, Christopher 11, Paul 9, Melanie 7, Michael 2—"so I am concerned with the impact of the world on them.

"Every book leaves a lot of unanswered questions. I write myself through a theme, and I am well aware at the end of having opened a lot of cans of beans that I haven't eaten. I'm only aware of this by hindsight.

"I wrote *Devil's Advocate*. This led me to question the nature of the Papacy, which men claim has all the ingredients of deposits of faith, bound up with historical and hostile accretions. The result was *Shoes of the Fisherman*.

"My interest in the East grew out of the fact that Pope John XXIII was a bridge builder. This is fine where you have a common heritage ... Out of that grew the impulse to explore Vietnam."

Now Morris West expects to go to China and, I gather, his novel culled from that experience will analyse the explosion of 800 million Chinese into the 20th century.

There are other ways in which questions turn out not to have been answered by Morris West's books:

"Pepino, who was one of Father Borelli's boys in the Naples book, came to see me in Rome the other day. He is married now, and has a minor post as a public service functionary. He brought his wife and his first son, and with fierce Neapolitan pride he said to me: 'You see, I've arrived. Are you proud of me? Perhaps one day you will write a book saying what really happened to Pepino.'

"It was," said Morris West, "quite touching."

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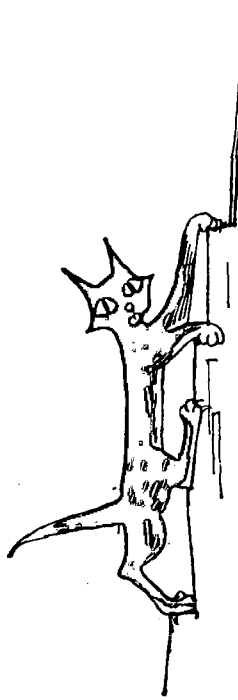
CAT CALLS

They call me cruel. Do I know if mouse or song-bird
feels?
I only know they make me light and salutary meals
And if (as 'tis my nature to) ere I devour I tease 'em
Why should a low-bred garden-boy pursue me with a
besom?

C. S. CALVERLEY, *Sad Memories*



HIGH SPIRITED

Geneva, September 6

A new conquest of the Matterhorn, this time by a ten-month-old black and white kitten, is reported from the Hotel Belvedere (10,820 feet), on the Hornli Ridge—the starting point for alpinists attempting to climb the mountain.

The kitten, accustomed to watch from the hotel home the dawn departure of the climbers, decided one morning to follow in their footsteps. He was soon left behind, but after a long and lonely climb reached the Solway hut (12,556 feet). The next day he climbed still higher, and when night fell bivouacked in a *couloir* above the shoulder.

The next morning he was seen by a group of climbers, who passed him by, convinced that his climbing skill, if not his spirit, would be defeated by the difficult Ropes Slabs and the Roof. They were wrong, and hours later the cat, miauling and tail up, reached the summit (14,780 feet), where the incredulous climbing party rewarded him with a share in their meal.

The Times, September 7, 1950

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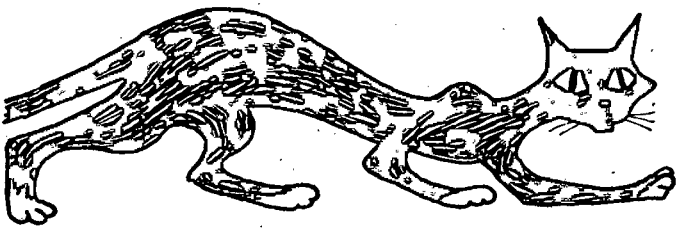

HODGE

I never shall forget the indulgence with which Dr. Johnson treated Hodge, his cat; . . . I recollect him one day scrambling up Dr. Johnson's breast apparently with much satisfaction while my friend, smiling and half-whistling, rubbed down his back and pulled him by the tail; and when I observed he was a fine cat, saying: "Why yes, sir, but I have had cats that I liked better than this"; and then, as if perceiving Hodge to be out of countenance, adding, "but he is a fine cat, a very fine cat indeed."

This reminds me of his ludicrous account of the despicable state of a young gentleman of good family. "Sir, when I heard of him last, he was running about town shooting cats." And then, in a sort of kindly reverie, he bethought himself of his own favourite cat, and said, "But Hodge shan't be shot: no, no, Hodge shall not be shot."

JAMES BOSWELL, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

To a Cat

Stately, kindly, lordly friend,
Condescend
Here to sit by me and turn
Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
Golden eyes, love's lustrous meed,
On the golden page I read.

Dogs may fawn on all and some
As they come;
You a friend of loftier mind,
Answer friends alone in kind.
Just your foot upon my hand
Softly bids it understand.

SWINBURNE

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A CAT'S LIFE

Decked in his gold-laced clothes, slashed sleeves, and highly powdered periwig, he walked about the house, changing his dress several times in the course of the day. While not occupied with his dress, two favourite Tom cats were a grand source of amusement to him: these had been his constant companions for several years, and were rather looked upon by him as friends and equals than as brutes, and had their places at table regularly assigned them every day. Finding so much satisfaction from dress himself, he was disposed to extend this source of amusement to his friends the cats, and laced habits were accordingly provided for them . . .

G. H. WILSON, *Eccentric Mirror*

Categorical

Is this small ball of fur a noedipus
Or just a budding feline Oedipus?
Will he, with lavish milk by me supplied,
Quickly forget his new-left mother's side
Or, complex-fixed, become a—groedipus?

PENDENNIS CASTLE,
Anxious Lines on a new Kitten

CATASTROPHE

That was the first crisis over, but there were plenty more to follow. There was the first time she went into the garden, for instance. The path was bad enough—she grumbled all the way out that the path was hurting her—but when we put her on the lawn and the stubbly grass prickled her paws she let out one shriek and went straight up my leg, swearing something had bitten her.

When her feet toughened up we had more trouble. The first time she went into the garden unaccompanied she climbed up the garage roof, slid down the back slope and fell into the water-butt. She got out somehow, stalked into the house stiff with indignation and delivered such a harangue, while green stagnant water dripped steadily off her tail on to our poor Indian carpet, that Charles slunk out in self-defence and made a cover for the butt on the spot.

DOREEN TOVEY, *Cats in the Belfry*

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Who was this inscrutable alien whose serenity caused their downfall? Science fiction with a sting in its tail.

COMMUNICATION PROBLEM

by John Christopher

BY 2049, when the *Wayfarer* was launched, interstellar travel had become something of a commonplace. Rocket motors had given way to nuclear motors, and then there had come the discovery of the Ku-Tsuni space warp, through which vast distances of the cosmos could be bridged.

Journeys still took some time, because for obvious reasons the jumps were made well out of range of the solar systems to and from which the ships were proceeding. And although theoretically one could leap to the centre of the galaxy, in fact exploration was confined to our own small corner, among a couple of hundred suns. One reason for this was that the warp's accuracy decreased with distance, providing an error on the outward flight which was more than doubled on the return.

But travel to the stars in itself was taken for granted, and the *Wayfarer* was launched as a freighter. A trickle of trade was flowing, and soon would be a flood. The *Wayfarer* was scheduled for the Rigel run. She had made three round trips before she went off course.

It happened when she encountered, in hyper-space, a sub-electronic storm. This was a hazard that was known, and not usually dangerous. Transit through the outer edges of the storm provided no more than a mild buffeting, and there were instruments to show where the storm centre lay, so that avoiding action could be taken. In this case, though, the *Wayfarer* had the bad luck to

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land in the storm centre itself; and the worse luck that her voyage had started on the day after Burns' Night and the duty officer was a Scot. Don Donaldson, feeling the whole ship vibrate with the storm's hammering and seeing the control room itself wreathed in a shimmering blue electrical discharge, slammed down the emergency lever for return into normal space. The result was a random jump to an utterly unknown destination.

The skipper, a non-drinking Swede, restrained himself with some difficulty from clubbing Donaldson to death on the spot, and considered the situation. It was bad, but could have been worse. They could have landed inside the close gravitational field of a sun, or even in its flaming heart. Equally, they could have found themselves a hundred light-years from the nearest possible haven. As it was, they were less than a light-year from a small sun with planets.

The rules for ships lost were simple and straightforward. One found a sun, landed on a planet, and set up a beacon sending out a distress signal that could be picked up by other vessels traversing hyperspace. Then one sat back and waited for the arrival of a patrol ship with the proper co-ordinates.

The *Wayfarer* went on to nuclear drive, and headed for the bright spot on her screen. As she approached, more became clear. The sun had five planets, and one of these, about twice the size of earth, showed a breathable atmosphere. This would make everything a great deal easier and pleasanter. The extra gravity would be a nuisance, but more than compensated for by the chance of living in the fresh air while the beacon was erected, and during the several weeks likely to elapse before the patrol ship arrived.

They orbited the world, and the scanners mapped it. It was about half land, half water, split into four major continents and the usual scatter of islands. The Swede started preparations for descent. These included routine checking of the retro-rockets, and this was where they had their second stroke of bad luck. The rockets were jammed, presumably as a result of the storm they had gone through. A man was sent out to inspect, and returned with the news that the damage was major: heat had welded the flaps together.

This left the Swede with a serious decision to make. It was theoretically possible to set up the beacon in space, but it would take at least ten times as long and involve considerable hazards. On the other hand, there was the known Hansen technique for landing on watery planets without retros.

He did not take long to decide. Hansen had been a Dane, and

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anything a Dane could do a Swede could do better. The answer was close orbiting, followed by a screaming lateral descent, and one skipped the water like a stone skimming the surface of a pond. This provided effective braking at the cost of being roughed up by half a dozen or more separate impact shocks—but nothing that the elastic landing cocoons could not handle.

Surveying the map that the scanners had drawn up, the captain decided that a stretch of east-west coastline near the tropics provided his best bet. He could skim along parallel with the shore, which meant that the amphibious craft, when launched, would have no more than a mile or two to cover.

The *Wayfarer* did its preliminary braking in the planet's outer atmosphere, then dipped inside. Three further orbits brought it into landing position, and she screamed down as prescribed. Everything was right: target point, trajectory, impact velocity.

All the captain had overlooked was something extremely obvious and quite deadly. The Hansen landings had been specified for planets of earth size or smaller. The *Wayfarer* would float under normal gravity, and float higher still under lesser gravities. On this planet her mass was considerably greater.

Donaldson, a cautious Scot when sober, would have spotted the error, but Donaldson and the captain were not on speaking terms. In fact, by the time Donaldson realised what was happening, it was too late to do anything about it.

The *Wayfarer* hit, gave one soggy bounce, settled into the waves and sank by the stern. In the three minutes of grace afforded them, a handful of men in the after part succeeded in breaking open one of the emergency hatches and launching a raft, in the shape of a long galley table. They grabbed what came to hand—foodstuffs chiefly—and clambered aboard. Then the *Wayfarer* dipped, carrying all but these few into the depths.

The captain, if he had wanted to, could have found a placid sea, but this had not seemed an important consideration. The sea in which they landed was choppy, and getting choppier, with a wind howling onshore from the south. The waters washed over the raft, which was only ten feet by four in size. They clung to the hope of rescue—the scanners had shown buildings, cities—but time went by and the hope dwindled. First one and then another, exhausted, cold and sick, lost his precarious hold and was washed away.

Rescue, though, was on the way. The Mori, who inhabited this planet, had seen the *Wayfarer* as she circled, and even roughly worked out her destination.

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They were an intelligent race, centipedal in shape, and at the beginning of their own technological explosion. They had not mastered the air yet—the extra gravity did not help—but they could imagine both that and the conquest of space, being keen astronomers.

They recognised the *Wayfarer* for what she was, and launched a rescue operation immediately. This was not entirely selfless in motive: there was no doubt in their minds that great advantages were likely to accrue from contact with a race capable of building so impressive a craft.

More than a hundred ships, including a monster ocean liner, were directed to the spot. Visibility was bad, and getting worse, but hour after hour the Mori ships criss-crossed the area, hunting and finding nothing. The spaceship, plainly, had sunk, and seemingly without trace. Disappointed, they prepared to call off the smaller vessels, since night was approaching and the Tuen would be coming up from the depths to savage anything less than fifty feet long. The larger ships would stay, and had searchlights, but the likelihood of their finding anything when they had failed by day was small.

And at that point one of the coasters saw it, a small speck bobbing on the port bow. After that, everything went quickly and smoothly. Within twenty minutes they had the raft in tow, and the solitary drenched survivor on board.

He was treated with all the respect due to a member of the race that had built the great galleon that had flamed three times round the planet before plunging to its death in the waters. This, too, was not entirely disinterested. Only establish communication, it was realized, and untold advantages might ensue. Even if this one were not himself a skilled technologist, he could provide hints which would enable breakthroughs to be made in a dozen different fields.

To this end, always with due courtesy and deference, some of the finest minds among the Mori were bent to the task: biologists, psychologists, physicists, mathematicians. They were confident that it would not be long before a proper contact was established. But the weeks went by, then the months, and the alien stayed alien, his expression inscrutable, his mind unknown. Six months after the rescue, the two chief investigators discussed matters with Preet, who held a very senior political position in the premier nation. One was Voka, a venerable biologist. The other, Sikla, was the acknowledged world expert in applied psychology.

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Preet said, "There must be some line we can try. Mathematical, perhaps? With stones, or something. Two plus two equals four—that sort of thing."

"One of our first approaches," Voka said. "We thought perhaps we were being too simple, so we brought in Pudi. He tried some very subtle things, but it got us no further."

"Star maps?" Preet suggested. "Drawings of the solar system?"

"That, too. Though it would only be of help as far as getting a minimal contact. He would not be likely to make much of star maps with Mora as the reference point; and he most certainly does not come from this solar system."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive. He has been breathing our air with no sign of distress: therefore he comes from a planet with an atmosphere not markedly different from our own. There is none in this system."

Preet looked sad, an expression indicated more by the rippling of his multitudinous feet than by the look on his face.

"I suppose the ship itself should have told us that, anyway. Such power and size . . ."

Sikla said, "There is one possibility that has occurred to us."

He was smaller than the others, paler red in colour, and he scratched his words in a higher key. Preet asked him, "What is that?"

"Their means of communication may be quite unlike ours. Nothing to do with speech, or writing, or gesture."

"Leaving what?"

"Direct mental communication."

"Telepathy?"

Sikla said reluctantly, as though the word offended him, "I suppose so."

"Should we not try that?" Preet said. "There are some who say that this can happen, even among us."

"We have tried," Voka said. "We called in those who specialise in this so-called discipline." He rippled his legs in gloomy distaste. "We have even tried those who claim to speak with the dead."

"With no results?"

"None. But if telepathy really does exist, then in us it is undoubtedly at a very low level. He would be no more likely to make anything of it than we can of the blowings and gruntings of the Tuen."

"Have you offered him tools, equipment?"

"Yes. He is not interested."

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Preet said, "Do you think he could be in a state of shock still —from the landing?"

Sikla said, "If he is, then shock in his race is nothing like anything we know. He eats, and drinks, and sleeps normally, showing no distress. Look at him."

They looked, and rippled their agreement.

"So what do we do?" Preet asked.

"Nothing," said Voka. "Perhaps they will send a rescue party for him. Perhaps that is what he is waiting for."

But the survivor had far-reaching effects on the Mori, all the same. First in respect of their failure to communicate. This produced disappointment, which in turn sparked off a kind of racial despair. Could one communicate with anyone, in the true sense? Was not even normal language between normal Mori a sign more of failure than success?

The Mori took their philosophising seriously. A wave of licentious living followed, and was succeeded by a counter-revolt of puritanism.

This partly stemmed from a deeper understanding of the alien. After attempts at communication had been abandoned, he was housed in quarters befitting a galactic ambassador, and offered what luxuries the world could afford.

The alien spurned them all. He lived his gracious, quiet, serene life with dignity. The example was impressive, and the Mori were ready to follow it. All over the planet, stock markets crashed as the bubble of the incipient Mori affluent society was pricked and the air wheezed out. Business slowed, industry stopped growing, went into reverse, ground at last to a halt. There was social unrest, which became revolution, and revolution gave way to chaos.

Famine and misery stalked the lands of Mora. In ten years, apart from a few small enclaves, they were back in the Dark Ages.

In one of the enclaves, the alien lived on. Voka and Sikla were dead of old age, and Preet had been brutally depedalised when his government was overthrown; but new guardians carried out their duties, still hoping for the great ship that might come winging through space, to rescue him and save the Mori from themselves.

The alien was contented. He had warmth, and food, and ease. It was a good life for a ship's cat.

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SOMETHING FUNNY IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

Argosy focuses on the work of a distinguished Continental cartoonist—Poul Ilsøe, otherwise PILS. The 36-year-old Dane, who lives in Copenhagen, left school when he was 20 and began immediately as a cartoonist. During the 1950s his work appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout Scandinavia and Western Europe. He turned to animated film production in 1958, producing his first long film *The Swineherd* in 1962. Later that year he gave up cartoon films and became a film director in television, a job which still occupies much of his time. Ilsøe was recently awarded a cartoon prize by the Italian Government.

For a sampling of his work please turn the page.

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PILS

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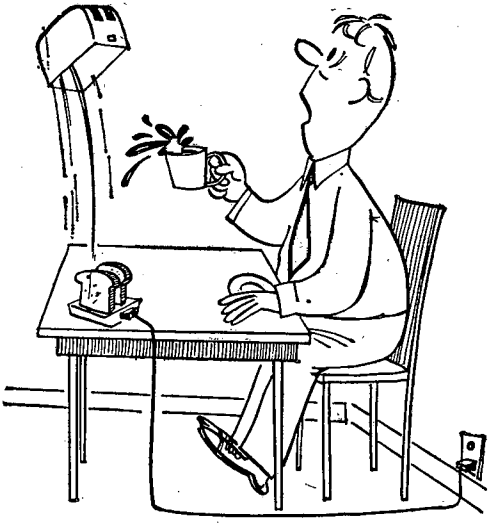

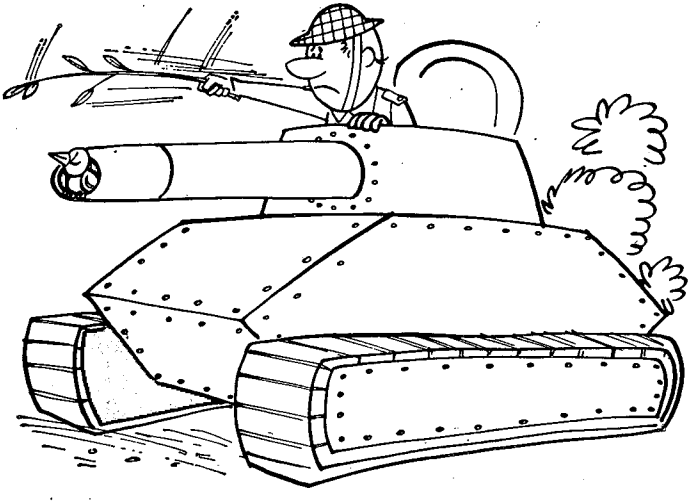

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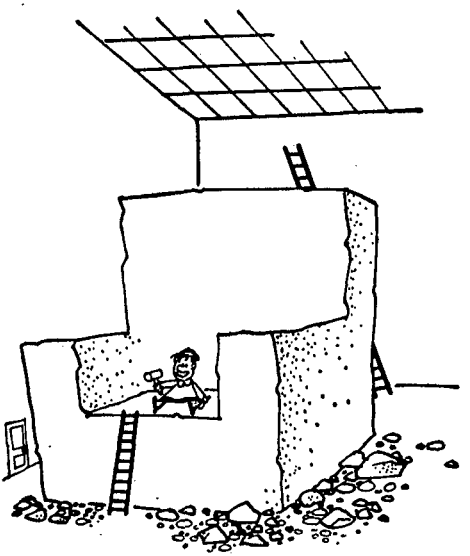

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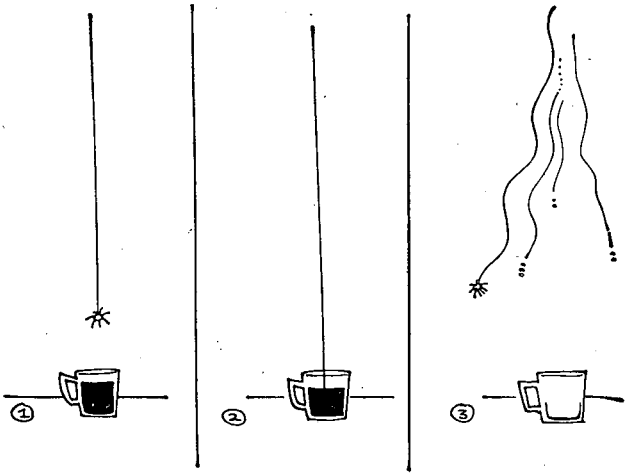

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A new and important name is added to Argosy's pages . . . João Guimarães Rosa, a Brazilian writer, who has been internationally acclaimed for his fresh and remarkable story-telling talent. We introduce him with a forceful story of man hunting man in the vast and cruel backlands of Brazil.

DUEL

TURIBIO TODO, born on the banks of the Borrachudo, was a saddle-maker by trade, had long hairs in his nostrils, and cried without screwing up his face; he was, to be exact, goitred, lazy, vengeful, and bad.

Even though the backlanders, his neighbours, state this categorically, nevertheless there were certain extenuating circumstances in the case. And at the beginning of this story right was on his side.

The modest little goitre, incapable of tempting a surgeon's knife, did not really constitute a deformity. Turíbio Todo was not bad-looking and, as he was obliged because of his goitre to wear collar and tie, at times he even had a kind of elegant air.

Nevertheless, he did not rate his attractions too high, and as a result he was inclined to be misanthropic, and for that reason he had taken up the saddler's trade so he could work at home and keep out of sight. But with the coming of the railway and, later, two roads, orders for bridles and saddlegear became few and far between, and Turíbio Todo drifted into the ranks of the unemployed.

As for the hairs in his nostrils and crying without screwing up his face, these may have indicated a mean, vengeful nature, but within bounds, a bare minimum, nothing excessive.

So, in this story, at least in the beginning—and the beginning is everything—Turíbio Todo was in the right.

It had been one of those left-handed days for him. He had

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gone fishing early in the morning, and when he got to the river he found he had forgotten his plug of tobacco; the mosquitoes ate him alive; he stubbed the toes of his right foot on a root; he lost his big hook when it got caught in the dead branches of a tree; and he was in a grumpy mood when he set out for home, his whole day's catch two measly catfish. Naturally, all these things were but harbingers of worse to come.

Up to this point, all Turíbio Todo would have had a right to complain about was his lack of good judgment. He had told his wife he would not be coming home to sleep, as he planned to go to the fishing grounds of Quatorze-Cruzes and spend the night with his cousin Lucrécio in Dêcàmao. To change his mind, without letting his wife know, that was one thing; but to come and find her in flagrant adultery (please excuse the word, but this is a true story), in the most delightful, pleasant, and carefree of illicit idylls . . .

Fortunately, the guilty parties did not hear him. Turíbio Todo was never a noisy person; he heard voices and peeked through a crack of the door; by the light of the little lamp inside he saw. But he did nothing. And he did nothing because the party of the second part was Cassiano Gomes, ex-corporal of Squad 1, Company 2, Fifth Infantry Battalion, whose members learned to handle Czech ZBs and even Hotchkiss heavy machine-guns, to music. He was, therefore, a lot of man to draw a bead on, even though scantily attired and not more than two hundred yards away, a dimly-lighted and moving target. Turíbio Todo was aware of all this, and also that Cassiano Gomes and his automatic were inseparable, whereas he, Turíbio, at the moment had nothing but his outraged honour and a knife to slice tobacco and dig out chigoes.

So, like the good, the typical countryman he was, who the madder he is, the cooler and better he reasons, Turíbio Todo slipped away even more quietly than he had come and went off to stew his white-hot hate in a pot of cold water.

And he did well, because with this there happened to him what happens to human beings under such circumstances at Latitude S 19, Longitude W 44: half a dozen steps and all his anger had turned into a state of relief, even satisfaction. He breathed deep and his mind was working pleasurably, weaving careful plans of revenge.

The next day, when he showed up at his house, he could not have been nicer to his wife. He had his horse shod, he cleaned his gun, he filled his knapsack, talked vaguely about going to hunt pacas, laughed a lot, moved around a lot, and

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went to bed earlier than usual. This happened on Wednesday.

By Thursday morning Turíbio Todo had completed his preparations and went to spy out Cassiano Gomes' house. He saw him at the window, with his back to the street. Turíbio Todo was not a bad shot; he put a bullet in the back of his neck. Then he ran home, where his horse was ready, tied to a hitching post, saddled and rested.

It never entered his mind to do away with his wife (Dona Silivana had big, beautiful eyes like a silly nanny-goat), for he was a gentleman, incapable of a cowardly act like mistreating a lady and, besides, the blood of one person is enough to wash, rinse, and bleach the most exacting honour.

Now he would have to disappear and stay away for a while and then everything would be fine, all neatly finished off, just as in other similar local instances.

But there was one little catch, one of those last-minute upsets whose result was to put two good, peaceful, and law-abiding men in the most devilish and involved situation.

Turíbio Todo, deceived by the great resemblance and having to fire on his adversary from behind, had liquidated, not Cassiano Gomes but Levindo Gomes, his brother, who was not a machine-gunner, or an ex-soldier, or anything, and who very particularly detested fornication with neighbours' wives. Turíbio learned of his mistake as soon as he put his foot in the stirrup. Wow! A hard gallop instead of a trot, he thought to himself. And he dug in his spurs and was off in a cloud of flying gravel and dust.

Cassiano Gomes accompanied his brother's body to the cemetery, scattered the first handful of earth into the grave, and received with quiet composure, sad and grateful, the condolences that were in order. Then he went back to his house, carefully closed the doors and windows—fortunately, he was a bachelor—and set out, with his green army-issue cape, his Winchester, automatic, and other supplies, to find Exaltino-de-trás-da-Igreja, who had riding horses for sale. He bought a sorrel mule.

When he was ready, and was fastening his cape to the saddle-straps, he caught what Exaltino-de-trás-da-Igreja was saying in a low voice to Clodino Prêto: "He's dead. Turíbio Todo is dead and buried. He's pulled his last trick."

Cassiano thought, smoked, calculated, trotted, figured, and two leagues from the village, on the highway going north, his speculations led him to the following conclusion: Turíbio Todo had relatives in Piedade do Bagre, or thereabouts. He would

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head straight there, still frightened at what he had done. He would not have taken any other route, and undoubtedly had ridden hell for leather, galloping all the way. After he reached Piedade—beyond that there was nowhere a Christian would think of going—and rested there among his own people, he would get mad again, and retrace his steps. He felt certain of all this—he took off like a hunted deer, but he'll come back like a jaguar . . . Somewhere on the road people meet, and might makes right . . .

So there was no need for hurry, and he could travel at a canter, without wearing out his mount. And, not to exhaust his reserves of hate, he put his mind on pleasant things and relaxed, hunting tinamou in the underbrush and quail and ring-necked doves in the fields.

Nevertheless, knowing that news always travels faster than honest folk, he thought it well to assist nature, so whenever he passed a group of mule-drivers, or overtook a tramp, a farm-hand, mattock on shoulder, Cassiano would stop to talk, and in the course of the conversation bring up the name of his enemy, heaping the worst insults on him: "Do you happen to know Turíbio Todo, the saddle-maker, that fellow with the goitre? Well, he is . . ." Aspersions on his legitimacy and disparaging remarks about his progenitrix followed. But a close mouth about his plans. No threats, merely insults.

In part Cassiano Gomes was right in his suppositions. Turíbio Todo had gone straight to Piedade to Bagre, like a deer with a pack of ten hounds at its heels, and a hunter's horn besides. But it took him only one day of rest to realise that he was in a blind alley, for that village was the beginning of nowhere. And he did not turn like a wounded jaguar. He traded his worn-out, hard-mouthed nag for a blaze-faced, white-footed grey, and doubled and backtracked like a fox. He changed his course to north-northwest, making for the uplands of Morro do Guará or Morro da Garça.

This was where Cassiano had misjudged and missed a trick. "I've got time," he said. And he went on with the hunt, trusting solely to the inspiration of the moment.

Now that the situation had grown more complicated, what mattered was to keep sidetracking and try to catch the other unawares, by surprise. And for this it was necessary to keep out of sight, for: "You know, the one in the light is the first to be seen, and the bullet fired from the dark finds its mark."

Turíbio Todo was at an apparent disadvantage in having to flee. But Cassiano had little faith in this flight, for at any

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moment the quarry could turn in fury; that is why it is sometimes better to be the hunted.

So, guided by such praiseworthy thoughts, he took to travelling preferably by night, cutting through the woods, avoiding the main highways, making great detours, and sleeping by day in out-of-the-way places. Just let him get careless or a little overbold, sleep with both eyes closed or make himself and his itinerary too well known, and at any hour, when least expected —nobody like a fellow with a goitre to slip through an ambush, they say—Cassiano Gomes would wake up to the crack of a bullet or a knife in his side, that is, supposing the other let him wake up.

Now, when he met a tramp or anyone on the road, he used all manner of schemes and lies to worm out information without letting it be known who he was. Yes, the time to broadcast information had passed, and now the question was to keep his ears open and know of Turíbio's movements.

And in this manner, as possibly Turíbio Todo was even more sly and gun-shy than he, for two months news was scarce and vague, and it was never known exactly where they were wandering or not wandering.

But during this interval it so happened that one day Cassiano, turning up in Traíras, overheard a conversation to the effect that the other was in Vista Alegre, where he had gone, homesick for his wife. Cassiano Gomes drew his conclusions and set out along the river bank, always keeping to the Guaicuí, which he forded at a pretty spot called Jequitibá, with waterfowl brooding in the barnyards of the houses and a lake in the middle of the village. At this very time Turíbio Todo, a little to the north, was making a triumphal entry into Santo Antônio da Canoa, where he was even bold enough to attend the Rosário festival with its theatre and an auction.

In a frenzy of anger Cassiano turned and retraced his route, crossing thickets, following cattle trails, cutting through wire fences, to fall, without warning, among the peaceful villages of the valleys. But the information service there was very poor and near Saco-dos-Cochos the two passed, less than a kilometre apart, armed to the teeth and thirsting for revenge.

Cassiano Gomes, who was only twenty-eight and, moreover, was the better strategist, advanced this way and that, now in feigned withdrawals, now in odd delays, always tracing spirals around the axis of the main highway. But Turíbio Todo, who was older, was inevitably the better tactician and he moved, advancing yet not advancing, zigzagging like the flight of a

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butterfly, or rather a moth, for he, too, had acquired nocturnal habits and besides, he had the great advantage of knowing the terrain like the palm of his hand.

Thus they kept on, tracing swift lines on all sides within a radius of ten leagues in that Mesopotamia which extends from the valley of Rio das Velhas—an almost human river, slow, undecided, sad, always changing, now narrow, now wide, with its reddish water, sand banks, wooded islands—to that of the Paraopeba—broad, symmetrical, serene, vigorous, with low-lying banks and sandy beaches glittering with scales of mica and waters too deep to be forded. Neither of them ventured to go through a deep pass or spend two nights in the same place, or cross an open plain overlooked by hills. If they had stopped and thought about the beginning of this affair, possibly both of them would have given a lot to get out of the mess, but this was no longer credible or possible.

When Cassiano crossed the Sela do Ginete sierra, he met a wandering beggar who provided him with a clue: Turíbio Todo, too, had changed routes, following the sun.

He went after him. But when he reached São Sebastião, he wept with rage. He encountered a horse rustler, driving his last herd for he had made a lot of money and was going back home to be an honest man again, and he told him that Turíbio Todo was a long way off.

At this point Cassiano changed horses again, buying a sorrel with a black mane, for the bay he had traded his mule for was saddle-galled in six places, and its shoulderpits were rubbed raw. The mule, too, was foundered in all four feet.

By this time Turíbio Todo, too, was on his fourth or fifth mount, and it was then he had the audacity to go back to his village, because he was yearning for his wife, Dona Silivana—that one with the big, beautiful eyes like a silly nanny-goat—with whom he spent a night, and to whom, at the hour of parting, he confided his final stratagem, swearing her to secrecy.

His wife advised him: " Why don't you go far away and wait till his anger passes? " Dona Silivana had plans of her own in that little head of hers . . .

" What's that you say? Swear you won't say a word to anybody! "

" Good heavens! Don't you trust even me? "

" Now look, aside from this goitre, I'm in the best of health, thank God. But he . . . Travelling around in the brush like that, we'll see. He keeps trading, trading horses, worse than a gipsy, but he can't keep up those tricks, not with that heart of

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his, which is in bad shape. It's just a question of waiting a while and then waving a red rag under the bull's nose. Ho, the wild bull! I am hunting without a dog, but I know how to wait, and it's the wait of a man with horns."

With all this Dona Silivana began to feel sick, a chill running through her, for Cassiano Gomes had not resigned from the army of his own accord, but had been discharged by the medical board. In spite of his dashing appearance, his heart was not much good.

Turíbio Todo took the shoes off his horse and bought new ones, which he pretended he was having put on, but didn't. This manœuvre had as its object to throw the other off his trail if he heard about it. He set out for Lages, where a rancher showed him the bay, the second mount Cassiano had used, sleek and recovered from its forced marches. This he could not resist: he bought it, paying half again what it was worth without bargaining, and set out for Tabocas, jubilant.

"Good little horse, a dead man's horse. I am getting my inheritance ahead of time, and with the best still to come, it will be a good one." And turning around, he insulted the invisible vision of his enemy. "Drop dead, you bastard."

Cassiano quickly learned of the saddle-maker's plans from Dona Silivana, thanks to the ready mouths which in the country often take the place of a radio.

In a pleasant meadow between Maquiné and Riacho Fundo, a spot that was off the travelled roads, a cowboy rounding up some runaway steers was the first to tell him: "What Turíbio wants is for you to die of a heart-attack, Cassiano. I wouldn't give him that satisfaction, not me."

Cassiano Gomes frowned thoughtfully, and answered: "The blackguard! But if that was what he wanted, he wouldn't be such a fool as to go around telling it. What he really hopes is that I will give up for fear of an attack." And he smiled a mirthless smile of frozen rage, resting on one of the stirrups, his body slouched, his reins loose, scanning the distant line of hills to see if it was going to rain.

But as Turíbio Todo had told the truth so the other would think it was a trick, it turned out that Cassiano Gomes was wrong once more. And the long duel went on, and the chase had now lasted five or five and a half months, monotonous and without coming to a head.

Until finally they changed tactics, setting out once more, not far apart—Turíbio Todo in the lead—from the Rio das Velhas, bearing west. And this perhaps for no good reason, either

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because the saddle-maker thought it a way to exasperate Cassiano further or because the latter, who had given up rum to keep his head clear, began to drink again about this time. And when Turíbio Todo described an arc from Aruá to Cedro, Cassiano Gomes followed precisely on an accelerated straight line, and every day, tomorrow and yesterday, touched his trajectory as a delayed tangent, or an advanced secant. Then they travelled at almost the same pace, perfectly parallel to one another, both feeling that the moment of truth had come and the end of so much feinting.

Until suddenly the two parallel lines met, at a river crossing, where a boatman transported cattle and people at four *reis* a head, and where the Paraopeba, that flat river, rolls its dull unshaded stream, bellowing in the wilderness.

Cassiano, who had received trustworthy information, and knowing now that he was on Turíbio's heels, arrived alongside the river about dusk. What if the son-of-a-bitch has already crossed?—he thought.

He rode straight to the shed, where all he found was two dozen cow-hides stacked one against the other. Pistol in hand, he lifted them one by one. Suddenly he whirled around, ready to shoot. But it was only a skinny little boy, sucking on a piece of sugar cane as long as a bamboo stalk.

" Did you see a white man pass through here, with a sort of goitre, riding a light bay with four black feet? Do you know if he crossed to the other side of the river?"

" No, sir. That one I didn't see, no."

" Who's the boatman here? "

" It's my father, yes, sir. He went to Coanxa to buy sugar. He'll be back early tomorrow morning . . . "

" Well, you go watch there by the bank. But don't tell anyone you saw me, understand? If that man shows up, you come quick and tell me, and I'll give you money, all you want."

And Cassiano unsaddled his roan and turned it out, hobbled with a long rope, behind a stand of false nettle, where there was good grass and clumps of green hay. Then he hid under one of the hides, for Turíbio Todo had to come that way, probably to cross the river, and it was a piece of good luck to have got there first.

When it had grown completely dark, he came out of hiding, on the alert, his gun at the ready. Crickets were chirping, owls hooting, and in the depths of the cool night, a dog was barking.

Cassiano's eye was caught by a fire, not three hundred metres off, down river. He dropped to the ground, as in his soldiering

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days, waiting for the silhouette of Turíbio to appear against the flames and then pull the trigger. But it was from up stream, behind him, that the report of shots came, from the cane-brakes; and the bullets whined close to his head.

" Mind the rules," Cassiano scolded himself, putting out his cigarette, whose lighted end had been the target. Now, from over by the side of the road, where a spreading whiptree stood black, like a crouching tapir, shots were coming, too.

Cassiano, edging himself backwards, in three consecutive bounds crossed to the thick coconut palm. There he squatted, hidden by the palm, and watched, waiting for some blurred bulk or moving object.

What in the devil was the meaning of this? The up-stream marksman, the one in the cane-brake, and the other, by the road, were they exchanging shots? Was each of them, at the same time, fighting two?

In a little while the firing ceased. But Cassiano did not close his eyes even for a minute all night long. Finally, with the little birds, came the morning. Dawn was breaking. And a man, tall and broad-shouldered, was suddenly standing in front of the shack. He carried a scythe and growled: " Where's your mate, the one with the goitre?"

" I'm alone, as you can see."

" If I don't know, I don't see."

And the hulking fellow leaned against one of the posts of the shed to defend himself against a possible attack from the rear. He drew back the arm holding the scythe and kept on: " How much did Red Elias pay the two of you to get rid of me? Huh? "

" Don't come any closer friend; this distance is good enough."

With his eyes fixed on the man's eyes, Cassiano sucked in his belly, and his body swayed a tiny bit, as though he were suspended by a thread, swinging in the wind.

The two never took their eyes off one another, both of them waiting for the sudden leap, the savage clinch. But Cassiano quickly grasped the mistake. And he shouted: " Stop talking nonsense, man. Are you dreaming? I have nothing to do with this business of yours. I never heard of Red Elias, and I've got nothing against you. I'm really after that fellow with the goitre myself, we've got a matter to settle between us, and you are just wasting time . . ."

The giant, without abandoning his threatening posture, drew his brows together to think, and stopped brandishing the scythe. " I don't know . . . I don't know . . . Suppose it's not true? "

Cassiano realised that he would have to convince him quickly

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or there would be a brutal fight, which would play into the hand of Turíbio who was now probably prowling close, and would arrive on the scene as cool as the last guest. So he answered curtly: " I am Cassiano Gomes from Vista Alegre, of the army, man."

" Hum-hum. Oh, ho," went the man, dropping his jaw and nodding his head affirmatively. Everything seemed to have cleared up in his mind. He had heard about that quarrel, of course he had. He was even in the habit of asking travellers coming west whether the last trump had been played.

Without further ado he came over to Cassiano, eager curiosity in his eyes. He was the boatman. He squatted down leisurely in front of him, laid by his scythe, and pulled a twist of tobacco and papers out of his pocket. And Cassiano had to tell him everything, from the beginning, while the boatman nodded his head in approval and kept on asking more questions as he sent out great clouds of smoke.

But Cassiano was eager to hunt down the assassin, who could not be far off. And the boatman, who knew he had to be neutral, let him patrol the place, fruitlessly, until lunch-time. Turíbio Todo did not show up.

" The shots must have scared him off. I used up a lot of lead."

" That's it. This way I'm getting nowhere and I'm wearing myself out. It will be better for me to go home and let time pass until he relaxes and gets careless." What Cassiano Gomes was doing was fooling himself, for the truth is that he suddenly felt weary, for a man is a man and not made of iron, and his heart lesion was beginning to make itself felt.

The boatman saw him mount and start off at a slow, indolent trot, the sorrel moving like a four-footed traveller that has long since lost hope.

Chico, the boatman, had expressed no opinion, and went fishing. But he had no more than anchored his canoe and dropped his hook amid-stream than someone on the bank began to shout and gesture. There was no doubt about it—it was Turíbio Todo arriving.

The boatman gathered in his line, poled vigorously, and slowly nosed his canoe into the bank.

Turíbio Todo, somewhat uneasy, started talking and inquiring about the shots and all. But Chico, with an unfriendly look, urged him to get on the raft. Then the boatman released the chain, steering with the pole and the raft swayed and advanced.

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Turíbio Todo sat down, watching the boatman out of the corner of his eye, full of suspicion.

The two men and the horse were quiet, but in the very middle of the river the boatman, frowning, began to stare, to stare. Turíbio, beside him, lowered his eyes. The other could contain himself no longer: "You're a poor excuse for a man, without guts or backbone! If you were a man, you would go back..."

"Me? I am a peaceable person and the father of a family, sir. You are mistaken."

"I know. You're running away, hiding. It makes me sick to see such a scoundrel dirtying up my raft." And he spat into the water, clearing his throat loudly.

Turíbio Todo twisted where he sat and clenched his teeth; his eyes glittered with anger. However, the boatman had the pole in his hand. Even on land he would be mean to tackle, but there, and not knowing how to swim—no, no, a thousand times no! All he did was to protest: "I have not done you any harm. Why would you be taking sides against me now?"

"All right, all right. God forbid! Don't get excited," the boatman answered slowly.

And he threw back his head to scratch his Adam's apple, settled the collar of his shirt, took a glance at the wire, pushed a coil of rope with his foot, and then sat looking askance at the other, not knowing what else to do. Until a wild duck flew overhead in migratory flight, its neck out, its feet together, dipping first one wing, then the other. It moved off the route the raft was following, steering with its tail, dropped, moved farther off, flapped its wings three times, and settled in the rushes of the left bank.

"Oh, that one's come a long way. It's migrating. Those that come from nearby stop when they get to the swampy bank. But a wild duck flying through doesn't stop; it flies across the river and doesn't settle until it's on the other side. Pretty thing. I think they do this the better to know where they are."

All happy and pleased. But Turíbio Todo answered never a word and pretended not to see the friendly smile the other was now offering him. The current kept slapping, breaking against the side of the raft, trying to mould itself into waves. The open river smelled of fresh rain. And the raft smelled of tar and good oil.

"There are the masked ducks . . . and the redheaded ducks ...and the big-beaked teal, and another bluish kind, and one of many colours. Then there is the little sun grebe that whistles. And there's the white-faced tree duck, and the herons,

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lots of them. But it's not every kind of feathered animal that flies over the river, no, sir: the hawk, big ones, those with a topknot, eagle-like, always coming from the backlands, go by. And they never return, seems like those folks kill them, over there. Me, I never kill any bird. The caracara comes by, too, but only when it is chasing some little bird, trying to catch it.

"At times, it's pitiful during the dry season, when some little ducks come all tired out—they must have come from far away. They make the mistake of thinking this is the Sao Francisco with lagoons along the bank, and they come to rest among the rushes. You can see that they haven't the strength to go on, but they can't rest; they keep fluttering their wings, as though someone was ordering, calling, drawing the poor things from far off. It's my opinion that many of them must drop dead on the way. Don't you think it's a queer world, friend?"

"I do."

The horse gave the railing a kick.

Chico went on: "That's a nice animal you've got there. Is it a pacer? Does it have a good gait?"

"It is. It does," Turíbio muttered. And he remained even more aloof, his arms folded, his eyes almost closed, enjoying the superiority he had so easily assumed, so absolute and pompous, though he did not raise his head, for a person with a goitre does not like to do that; but he felt his conscience sleek, perfectly at ease.

The land was approaching. They pulled into the slip. Turíbio paid.

"Go with God," the boatman even wished him.

"Amen," Turíbio answered over his shoulder as he mounted. And he galloped off.

In a little while he came to a road in sight of the uplands which opened on the horizon, where the crested screamers ran with their cries and their long legs. But after that Turíbio Todo began to see places he did not know. Grey, treeless plains. Buritĺ-da-Estrada—red land; Pompeo—dwarf palms, with almost no trunk, opening out their green fronds; —Papagaio— And he kept on, always bearing south.

Then in these new places new things began to run through his head, and he, too, felt a great desire to rest. How good it would be to be free of all these fatigues! Turíbio Todo wanted to play no more.

He was now at the edge of the zone known as West Minas

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Gerais. And he came upon a river, green and hidden, one of those rivers people always come upon like that, suddenly, a living river, running through the trees, like an animal.

"What river is this, so pretty, boy?"

"It's the Pará. What did you think? But let's cross to the other side, for the malaria is bad here."

"Oh, no. I'm not crossing. But, tell me, what is the biggest town around here?"

"Sant'Ana-do-São-João-Acima."

"I'm going there to see if I can send a letter to my wife."

Then a gang of merry fellows hailed him. They were going south for the coffee-picking. From Bahia to São Paulo. And one of them said: "We're going to São Paulo, man—make a lot of money. Money grows on trees there."

He was homesick for his wife. But it would be only for a short time. Afterwards he would send for her. He went along with them...

Cassiano Gomes on his way home remarked: "There's no profit in this business of revenge. I'm giving it up. It's better to leave it to God." But even as he spoke his hand, as though of its own accord, gently, slowly, stroked the handle of his knife, and for that reason nobody believed him.

And afterwards Cassiano went on seeing the *femme fatale* of this story, that same one whose eyes were bigger and blacker than ever and more like those of a silly nanny-goat. And Dona Silivana showed him the letter sent from Sant'Ana-do-São-João-Acima and later another, also on lined paper, containing a mallow leaf with a heart and arrow traced on it, full of tender thoughts and coming from Guaxupé.

"He went to São Paulo."

"Did he? What a foolish thing. He need not have gone. My anger has worn off. If he were to come back, I wouldn't do anything to him. If you write him, you can tell him so."

But Dona Silivana, with a languid expression answered: "Let him stay there. Isn't it better so?"

It was, and women are always right.

Besides, it was not advisable for a gentleman who has been discharged from the military service because of a faulty valve in the heart to wear himself out in such hard raids, in a war to the death. Cassiano now felt that the slightest effort brought on a mounting weariness.

And from noon on, he could no longer wear shoes because his ankles swelled.

He went to the chemist, and asked his frank opinion.

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"You really want my opinion, Mr. Cassiano? You— Well, if the swelling comes in the afternoon, and the eyes don't swell, only the legs, that's a bad sign."

"Am I going to die soon?"

"Well, not so soon. Around Midsummer Day of next year. But if it keeps getting worse, around Christmas."

And Cassiano Gomes thought: I'll sell everything I have, take the money, go to Paredao-do-Urucúia to take leave of my mother. And then, I'll take the down-country road and catch up with that Turíbio in Sao Paulo, or wherever he is. And he said goodbye to everybody, knowing he'd never return.

But on the way he got worse and had to halt in Mosquito, a settlement in a hollow in the foothills, far from everywhere, where three dozen shacks filled the pleasant valley, which smelled of wild fruit and berries, with cows licking the walls of the houses, with casuarinas to make music in the wind, and tall copal trees before the doors for shade. In a word, a spot where people hated to stop for fear of having to spend the rest of their lives there.

It was precisely there that Cassiano Gomes had his attack, his mitral valve functioning badly. They got him off his horse, and took him in. He stretched out on a plank bed, his belly swollen with dropsy, panting like a deer-hound after a hunt.

He got better. And he ground his teeth at the thought of Turíbio Todo. But, thank God, he had money. He inquired whether there might not be a brave man there able to handle a matter of that sort. He would pay up to a thousand *milréis*.

There was none. Cassiano had made a poor choice of a place to fall sick. Everybody in Mosquito was wizened, sallow, malaria-ridden, ragged, suspicious, had never seen a train and was non-aggressive and listless. They could recall no bloody crimes, they had no deaths on their conscience. "Begging the gentleman's pardon, but you see nobody here wants to get into trouble. . ."

"And is there nobody here to take a message to some brave man from close by to come here?"

"Around these parts, people like that, for a job of that sort, there's nobody . . ."

"Then I'm leaving, right away."

But he could not take more than three steps. He staggered and had to sit down at the door of the hut; and it was there, sitting on the steps, that he came to spend his time, day after day, his chest resting on his knees and, from force of habit, his Winchester in his lap and his automatic within reach.

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The landscape was sad, and even sadder in the afternoon, the cicadas. Pigs went by wearing headstalls so they could not get through the fences around the fields. Hens went by, clucking, leading their brood under the quince tree. And scarlet cuckoos flew through the scarlet branches of the coral bean-trees. The natives of the valley passed, too—women with their skirts pinned up, water jugs on their heads, coming from the spring; children with swollen bellies, amusing themselves by throwing stones at the animals or eating dirt; and the men, with picks or scythes, but happy and light-hearted, walking jauntily, dragging their sandals, or swaying, as though about to kneel but not kneeling, or with a duck walk—from side to side—flat-footed, lurching.

And a brother of Timpim passed, beating Timpim. In view of the difference in size, this was a cowardly thing to do, and Cassiano called out: "Hey, you. Come here."

Timpim's brother came over, thinking he was talking to him. But Cassiano growled: "Get away from here. So brave! A real man-eater. Get away from here, nobody has sent for you yet. When I start calling the hogs, then you can come."

With this Timpim was able to come over to him, shy and hesitant.

"Come closer, boy," said Cassiano. "What's your name?"

"The gentleman is going to laugh at me. But if you call me by my right name, Antônio, nobody will know who you mean. Timpim is a nickname I don't like. I'd rather you called me Twenty-One."

Cassiano started to laugh, but he had to stop for he began to cough and spit blood. "Twenty-One. That's a good one. But how does a person come to be called Twenty-One?"

"It's another nickname they gave me. And it was because my mother had twenty-one children, and I was the last one. That was why they gave me that name."

"And who is that big good-for-nothing? That fellow who was knocking you about?"

"That's my brother Izé, yes, sir."

"And why was he hitting you?"

"Because he wanted to take away these few sweet manioc roots. And I wouldn't give them to him because I am taking them to my wife who had a baby the day before yesterday and there's nothing in the house for her to eat."

"So you're married, Twenty-One? Is this your first child?"

"No, sir, this makes three. The first one died when it was a year old, and the next one, a girl, was born dead."

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"And how is it that you stood there and did not hit him back?"

"You see, sir, my mother always told me I must never raise my hand to an older brother. And as they are all older, that's why they all hit me."

Cassiano looked the man over, from head to foot and back again. "I'll be damned. Now, tell me one thing, are you always like that, as stiff as a cliff? Doesn't your body ever slouch or your shoulders droop?"

"No, sir. I don't think so. I don't know."

"Well then, take this money and buy some chickens for your wife, and come back tomorrow."

The next day Timpim gave Cassiano a surprise: he brought the baby for his blessing, all swaddled in blankets and with a rag pacifier dipped in honey in its mouth.

And the baby, which was pretty and lively, opened its eyes at Cassiano, who was touched by its fragility: "Not to be able to see my mother before I die," he murmured, sobbing. He asked to be helped to his bed, but he was a different man now, for crying in earnest does one good.

Half-sitting, half-lying on his pallet, leaning back on a pile of rags, pillows, even an old saddle, which the kind-hearted women had fixed up for him, panting and moving about to get air, he forgot his fire-arms and waited for the hour of death. The calm and sadness of the village were immutable, with lullabies sung by the fire, the call of the whippoorwills, and the mournful lowing of the cattle. The peace of the surroundings soothed his soul while his face grew ever more swollen around his bluish lips and the malady clutched at his heart.

He began to ask the old women to come and pray beside his pallet. He wanted the children, small children, to play nearby, and he gave them money. And he lay silent, counting the rafters, black with soot, and watching the spiders swinging on the threads they spun to climb up and down. And for the first time in those months he recalled his murdered brother, realising that because of his death he had been hunting Turíbio Todo. And he also thought about heaven, something he had never had time to do until then.

And it was on a day when he was worse and had ordered the window opened so the inquisitive and glowing sun could come in, that Timpim also entered the room, his eyes red, his nose running, weeping softly.

"Why, what has happened, Twenty-One?"

It was the son, the baby, who was sick, very sick, and for

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lack of help was on the point of dying. And Timpim began to sob, the tears flowed, yet he did not bend over.

Cassiano asked: "Tell me one thing, Twenty-One. Is there a doctor in Abóboras?"

"There is one, yes sir, but it were better if there weren't. How can I, who own nothing in this world, pay a doctor thirty *milreis* a league to come here? I have already sent to get a prescription from him, and all the rest of the money you gave me I spent on medicines from the chemist's."

"Well, here is the money. Bring the doctor. Buy the medicines and everything you need. If necessary, there is still more."

Timpim's eyes started from his head, for he found it hard to believe. Suddenly, he cried still louder and knelt at the feet of his benefactor, trying to take his hand and kiss it, and pouring out thanks and blessings amid his sobs.

"It's nothing. Nonsense," Cassiano said, drawing his hand away. "I need a doctor to look me over, too. And bring a priest at the same time, for I want to make confession."

Timpim was now determined to kiss his feet, and still weeping, brought out: "God will reward you, Mr. Cassiano Gomes. I can't, because I have nothing. If the baby had not been baptised right after it was born, you would be its godfather. But, even so, if you have no objections, I will look upon you as the godfather, and the person to whom I owe the most, for I will never forget all your kindness to me."

At this Cassiano, deeply moved in turn, for it is better for people to be good than bad, drew him to himself in an embrace, saying: "Better pay than this I could not have, friend Twenty-One." And Cassiano Gomes could not hide the comfort all this brought him.

The doctor came, the priest came. Cassiano made confession, took communion, received the holy oils, and prayed.

Should he send the money to his mother? No. He sent for Timpim, to have the satisfaction of seeing the effects of his good works. They talked. Then the dying man said to the other: "All this money is for you, friend Twenty-One."

Then a happy expression came over his face, he spoke of his mother, pressed a medal of Our Lady of Sorrows between his fingers, died, and went to heaven.

Turíbio Todo learned the good news in a letter from his wife who, now all affection, begged him to come home. He had already earned a lot of money, and the letter made up his mind for him. He bought a suitcase, he bought presents, tied a

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green handkerchief around his neck to hide the goitre, put on shiny red-leather boots, and set out.

He got off the train with a cigarette-holder, too, a wrist watch, good clothes, and a new outlook on life. But he still had a day's travel by horseback, and he was in a hurry because Dona Silivana had beautiful eyes, big eyes, like a silly nanny-goat. For that reason he did not take the time to buy a horse; he hired one, ate without being hungry, and started on his journey.

He had covered the first league. The joy in the open freedom ahead of him made him indifferent to the showers that fell from time to time.

All of a sudden he heard the clatter of a swift gallop behind him. He pulled his horse over to the side of the road, stopping under a sucupira tree, and watched and waited. It was a pony or mare, thin, spotted, with monstrously thick hairy fetlocks and a half-pint rider on its back.

The rider pulled up short, level with Turíbio, the nag gave a snort, and a fleck of white foam fell on Turíbio's sleeve.

"Has that horse of yours got distemper, boy?" Turíbio Todo pointed with a quirt at the animal's nostrils.

"No, sir. It's been standing idle for a long time. That's why it tires easily."

The countryman, with a smile full of teeth stumps, sat looking at Turíbio who, in turn, looked him over, hardly able to keep from laughing. For the other, instead of a cape, was wearing a burlap sack with the seams ripped out at the sides, and his head through a hole in the middle. The strange garment hung down in front and on the sides like a chasuble of a priest saying mass. He was barefooted, with buck spurs on his ankles, and for a whip he carried a switch in his hand.

The little spotted horse—it was really a horse—with its tail tied up and its mane clipped close, its nostrils snuffling, its ribs showing, had the same poverty-stricken air: the bridle was of rope, the saddle, a thin pad like a pack-saddle, one stirrup missing, with neither crupper nor girth.

The new arrival pulled out a knife and tobacco which, by country-road conventions, indicates a desire to talk.

But Turíbio Todo was in a hurry: "If you're travelling my way, let's go."

"Yes, sir."

And they drew their animals abreast.

The little backlander let the bridle drop to the pony's neck, which was doing its best to keep up with the other horse, and

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he sliced his tobacco carefully, collecting it in the hollow of his hand.

Turíbio did not take his eyes off him, finding everything about him highly amusing—his face, his ways, his horse, his unkempt, lousy hair, his burlap cloak. But he rather liked him. And he held out his package of cigarettes.

The young fellow reached as though to take one, but drew back his hand quickly. "Thanks very much but I smoke this kind we use, of straw paper. We're used to rough things."

What manners, Turíbio Todo thought.

The other struck a light from his flint and took a long drag at his cigarette, which seemed to give him courage. "Excusing the question, but aren't you Turíbio Todo, the saddle-maker of Vista Alegre, coming back from foreign parts?"

"I am. I'm coming from São Paulo. How do you happen to know? I just got here today."

"They told me, there in the store."

Turíbio laughed. He liked the little fellow more every minute. "Why is it folks like you don't go there to work, too? You could earn money, live well. This, around here, isn't living, it's a kind of creeping misery that breaks the heart. If you want to go, I can tell you just what to do. I'll even help you with money."

"No, people born here stay here." Then, embarrassed, as though wanting to change the subject, he pointed up: "Look there."

In the highest branches of a beauty-leaf, a marmoset, frowsy and grimacing, was gesturing, screeching, and jumping about. The riders stopped. Turíbio Todo pulled out his revolver and took aim. But the little monkey hid behind the trunk of the tree, peeking out every once in a while to see what was going on. Turíbio was touched and put his revolver back in his belt.

"Go along, you poor devil. Why should we bother these little forest things? They have a right to live, too. There in São Paulo, one day..."

"Sir, how much did you pay for your horse?"

Turíbio Todo turned, surprised and uneasy, for his companion, so humble and meek, had interrupted him now for the second time. "I hired it. Let's get along. Is this Restinga?"

"No, sir, this is Quilombo."

Here and there a country shack stood beside the road among banana trees.

"Let's get a move on, young man, for I'm in a hurry to get where I'm going."

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They came to the ford of a stream. The horses, halfway up their legs in the water, bent their necks to drink.

The air was cool. From the hills came a good smell of moss, Spanish moss, of old verdure. And the saddle was so soft, the purling of the water so soothing, that Turíbio slipped one foot out of the stirrup and sat watching, tenderly, a dragonfly that circled, glittering, and came to rest on the bridle-strap.

The countryman was quiet, too, thinking his own thoughts, watching how, with each movement of the horses, the mud rose in the water, clouding its surface. It was finally the horses themselves, their thirst quenched, that moved on again.

"I am very happy. I am going to see my wife whom I haven't seen for a long time. By tomorrow afternoon I should be getting to the place where her mother lives. If she wants to come with me, we'll go back to São Paulo. I want to rest a while and enjoy life," Turíbio Todo said.

"No, Mr. Turíbio Todo. Excuse the word, but this world is a dung-heap. It's not worthwhile for people to be happy..."

"Hey, there, what kind of talk is that?"

"People live suffering. The world is nothing but suffering. It's not worthwhile... And then everybody has to die some day."

"You know, what you need to do is look after your health so as not to have ideas like that," Turíbio advised.

The other kept quiet. He was downcast, lugubrious, as though carrying the weight of the whole world on his shoulders.

They ascended a hill, they descended the hill, and the road led into a thick wood where all was silence and shadow. One of the horses snorted and champed its bit. Rain that had fallen earlier rolled off the branches that brushed the faces of the riders.

And suddenly Turíbio Todo shivered as he heard, steady and loud, a voice such as he had not yet heard from the countryman: "Mr. Turíbio, get down and pray, for now I'm going to kill you."

"What's that? You've gone out of your mind!"

But the countryman was stern and pale, and his right hand held an old muzzle-loading pistol with two parallel, sinister barrels. "Get down quickly, Mr. Turíbio." And the little man said this almost gently, but without taking his terribly attentive eyes off him.

"You whelp—I'll crush you..."

"Don't yell, Mr. Turíbio. It won't help. I beg your and

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God's forgiveness, but there's no other way, for I promised my friend Cassiano, there in Mosquito, at the very hour he closed his eyes . . ."

At the mention of his enemy's name, Turíbio Todo's fright grew. The hand holding the muzzle-loader trembled. Turíbio, too, began to tremble. "How much did he pay you? I can give you double, I'll give you all I have . . ."

"There's no other way, there's no other way, Mr. Turíbio. After God, it was he who saved my son's life. And I promised him when he was already holding the candle in his hand. It's too bad. But there's no other way. There's no help . . ."

Stupefied, Turíbio stared helplessly, and felt that fear which comes from not having time to think. "Listen—I, too, have children . . . I have . . ."

"Get down, Mr. Turíbio."

"For the love of the Holy Virgin, for the love of your son, don't do this. God will punish you. Don't kill me . . ."

"Go ahead and pray, Mr. Turíbio, for I don't want you to lose your soul."

At this point Turíbio Todo was overcome by horror and stretched out his arms. "Wait. Wait. Don't shoot yet." And raising his hand to his head, he made the sign of the cross and in a quavering voice, broken by tears, began: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost . . ."

But no! Not like that, like a sheep, no! He twisted sideways, pulling out his revolver, gave a slap of the reins and a kick with his spurs, making the horse rear.

But the muzzle-loader did not miss. Turíbio Todo drooped and sank over in the saddle, a bullet in the left side of his face and another in his forehead. The horse broke into a run and the foot of the dead man slipped out of the stirrup. His body slid sideways, fell, and lay sprawled on the ground.

Timpim Twenty-One then made the sign of the cross, too, and opening his knees, set spurs to his horse. And the shaggy little pony galloped off down a trail through the *itapicurús* and the *canudos de pito,* leaving the main road behind.

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Translated into English by Harriet de Onis

JOÃO GUIMARÃES ROSA who was born in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 1908, was a doctor before he became a diplomat in 1934. His most notable work is *The Devil To Pay In the Backlands*; his stories have appeared in French, German, Italian.

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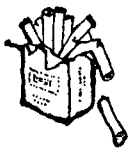
Women,



All women are pets,
But most women shouldn't be allowed to open a package of cigarettes.
I call down blessings on their bonny heads,
But they can't open a package of cigarettes without tearing it to shreds.
Of the two sexes, women are much the subtler,
But the way they open a package of cigarettes is comparable to opening a bottle of wine by cracking it on the butler.
Women are my inspiration and my queen,
But as long as they can rip the first cigarette from the package they don't care what happens to the other nineteen.

OGDEN NASH, *Versus*

Legal Tender

He was rich and old and she
Was thirty-two or thirty-three.
She gave him fifteen years to live—
The only thing she meant to give.

JUSTIN RICHARDSON,
Wholly Matrimony

All this, and . . .

If the heart of a man is depressed with cares,
The mist is dispelled when a woman appears.

JOHN GAY, *The Beggars' Opera*

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ah, Women...

By two black eyes my heart was won,
Sure never wretch was more undone.
To Celia with my suit I came,
But she, regardless of her prize,
Thought proper to reward my flame
With two black eyes!

ANON

"Woman's at best a contradiction still."
ALEXANDER POPE, *Moral Essays*

Eternal Eve

When I say that I know women, I mean that I know that I don't know them. Every single woman I ever knew is a puzzle to me, as I have no doubt she is to herself.

THACKERAY

Auld Nature swears,
the lovely dears,
Her noblest work
she classes O;
Her prentice hand
she tried on man,
And then she made
the lassies, O.
ROBERT BURNS,
Green Grow the Rushes

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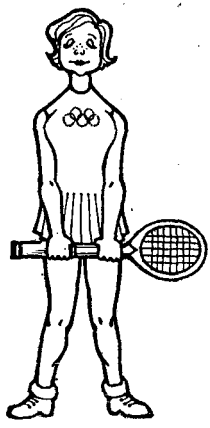
THE HUNTRESS

You think that you are Ann's suitor; that you are the pursuer and she the pursued; that it is your part to woo, to persuade, to prevail, to overcome. Fool: it is you who are the pursued, the marked-down quarry, the destined prey. You need not sit looking longingly at the bait through the wires of the trap: the door is open, and will remain so until it shuts behind you for ever.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW,
Man and Superman

ah, WOMEN...



The sort of girl I like to see
Smiles down from her great height at me.
She stands in strong, athletic pose
And wrinkles her retroussé nose.
Is it distaste that makes her frown,
So furious and freckled, down
On an unhealthy worm like me?
Or am I what *she* likes to see?

JOHN BETJEMAN, *The Olympic Girl*

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Abandoning all she lived for was too much to ask, and she knew now was the time to make . . .

A CLEAN BREAK

BY JOHN PUDNEY

AMANDA began the affair frivolously. At first she was laughing at Viktor. At his fanciful notions which seemed so immature, his fits of earnestness and introspection, his moments of biting candour, the Slavonic airs and graces which still clung to him after all his years in Europe and America.

Then she found herself laughing with him, sharing the fanciful notions, the earnestness, concerned with the introspection, reacting to the candour, often flattered by the airs and graces. It was her concern which hit her hardest. She was sorry for him. Motherly instinct, she told herself. She was so settled with Nigel and the children; Viktor so rootless, for all his freedom and the money he "enjoyed making," as he would say—just the sort of thing Nigel would never say.

It came then as a shock when he first kissed her on the lips, smack with perfect marksmanship, and then said irrelevantly that he was sorry for her.

"Why?" she gasped as the kiss sank down through her body, driving out the misgivings which should properly have been there. "Why sorry for me, Viktor?"

He tweaked her ear, rather cruelly. "Because, my darling Amanda, you're too good to be true."

She said nothing for a while; and he was good at saying nothing too. She learned afterwards that their shared silences were one of the most rewarding sides of the affair.

He had spoken seriously, but possibly ambiguously. Even if she had known what to say, she would not have been able to bring it out without betraying some quaver in her voice. That

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silence was not broken by words, anyway. She reached out over the safety line, ran her hand down the back of his head and, with gentle pressure on the nape of his neck, brought his lips down to hers. Afterwards, like a sleep-walker, she crossed the room and stood by the window. This was her own living room; yet for a few moments she stood there looking out over the terrace like a stranger. "It's raining," she said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "You'd better go, though, Viktor."

"Never talk to me about the weather. We have no time for that, Amanda." He came and stood very close, but did not touch her. "I shall go, even if a part of me stays."

With a tenderness no longer maternal she saw him to the front door. He looked at the rain, shivered and turned up the collar of his jacket. "And of course you'll tell Nigel I called?"

"Naturally," she said. "He gets back tomorrow."

With an impudent smile he turned to face her. "I know," he said softly, "Angel Face told me."

"Then why did you call here to talk to him about that advertising account?"

He pirouetted, bowed, danced a few capers in the rain, then sprinted to his car. He swished out through the gates, did not wave back. She slammed the door and was alone in the house.

She wished the children were not at boarding school. Their presence would have staved off this thing. They would have brought her back to herself instantly—or would they? One of Nigel's favourite arguments for sending them away had been that she would have more freedom. He talked a good deal about freedom and tolerance, in the abstract, and when he had time.

"Freedom to do what?" she had asked.

"Your art, for instance. You could go to regular classes again with the children off your hands. It would be good for you, and character-building for them."

So they went to boarding school and she started classes three times a week again. Nigel took pride in the whole expensive arrangement, which he said he could well afford, especially as that sort of education was in itself an investment. She suspected that status-building came into it. While Nigel never boasted, suffered if anything from false modesty about his own considerable attainments, the children at that good school, and wife driving herself across the city to attend art classes and working rather successfully in the studio he had had built—all added a little to a man's stature, unostentatiously of course.

It was what he liked to call a creative approach to living, and it gave him great content as he drove himself in the big car into

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the city every morning which, until he became snarled up in the traffic, was about the only time he had to commune with himself. Sometimes at the office he would discuss it with his secretary, Sue Rossiter, whom Viktor alone called Angel Face.

No doubt about it, though, Nigel was generous, kind and tolerant. He was good through and through. His ambitions were honest and straightforward. He had drive, but no meanness. He was also driven. Too good-natured and absorbed to protest, but overworked. Business spilling over into home life. Paper-work sloshing out of briefcases at the fireside. International telephone calls at odd hours. Dinner parties for colleagues or clients, with Rossiter telephoning to brief Amanda about the guests and to ask if there was anything special she could pop out and buy for Nigel to bring home. Amanda would say, Yes, a nice piece of Brie or a bottle of liqueur brandy, and it all went like clockwork.

Amanda enjoyed cooking, never flapped, and found the company stimulating. The tolerant Nigel would not tolerate fools, not at least to the extent of inviting them to his home. Though Amanda took it all so well, he never pressed these business acquaintanceships too hard. "Let's have some of your art friends this week," he would say, and they did and Nigel was a great success with all of them, sensitive, knowledgeable about all the arts—he always set aside time to read the serious weeklies—and ready to listen. Amanda's so-called "art friends" told her how lucky she was to have Nigel.

Lucky to have Nigel, yes. The security, the tolerance, the good life. Too good? Why had Viktor made that preposterous remark about being too good to be true? Twisting it round a bit, it fitted in a wry disturbing way she didn't much like. She just wasn't true. From the rash deliberation of that first drawing of Viktor's lips down to her own, a part of her nature had stampeded out of control across the frontiers of truth, of reason.

And it was too sudden. When he telephoned his invitation to lunch she tried to be off-hand, and only succeeded in sounding like an overworked operator.

"Have you swallowed something the wrong way or have you just got your mouth full?" said Viktor.

"I said I'd be delighted to come. Sorry if it was indistinct."

"Mark Hiven is coming. He has always wanted to meet you."

"Mark Hiven . . ." Her voice went flat.

"He always likes to meet people who have bought his pictures. Harmless vanity. You'll find him very good company."

"I'm sure I shall." Her mouth was dry with disappointment.

"Don't cheer so loudly, Amanda. You'll be in the right mood

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for meeting Nigel this evening. Something to talk about on the way back from the airport."

"There'll be plenty to talk about," she said aggressively. "And how do you know I'm going to the airport?"

"Just Angel Face."

"Is Sue Rossiter your secret agent?"

"A source of information, that's all. I have a good deal of business with Nigel just now."

"So it seems. I wonder you don't get Miss Rossiter to telephone me to arrange about lunch."

She regretted this as soon as she had said it. She had betrayed herself, and Viktor laughed. "One doesn't leave such things to the servants"—he sounded very Central European—"at least, I don't." Then he added softly, "Don't be too put out about Hiven. Only last week I heard you say he was one of the most interesting painters alive."

She had said that, and Nigel had murmured that buying his work was not a bad investment, though of course it was more important that the work looked so well in the dining room. Of course she had hoped to meet Mark Hiven, and of course she ought to be pleased and flattered. Yet she had that surging desire to talk to Viktor alone, to explain before Nigel got back how impossible this was, to make a graceful retreat across the safety line . . . Or was it that she just wanted Viktor alone?

Hiven proved to be engaging, witty, articulate about his own work and contemporary painting. He drew her out. She was at her best; she sparkled. She captivated him—and he made no bones about acknowledging this. Viktor enigmatically acted as a foil, adding to the lustre of the encounter without obtruding. He brought it all to an end, though, quite decisively, by saying, "Now push off, Hiven, and finish that greenery-yellowry piece while you still have some light."

"Strip-lighting suits me just as well—even for flesh," said Hiven vulgarly as he got up. "But, yes, the masterpiece needs to be finished," he glanced at them significantly, "while the heart is in the right place. I'll be seeing you." He bracketed them in this perfunctory farewell and was gone.

Viktor leaned across the table, lightly gripped her wrist, laying his second finger along her forearm. "Coming, Amanda?"

His long finger ran over the hair on her arm. She looked into his eyes and sighed. Then she nodded. Ten minutes later she was following him into his flat, and he was saying, "You stepped right out of yourself when you talked to Hiven."

"Was that why you invited him to lunch? Was it a test?"

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He laughed. "Litmus paper? Could be. I think *he* changed colour anyway." He walked down the passage. "Coming?"

Her head high, she walked through the door. As she closed it in his face, she said, "Now just wait."

She was as deliberate as that. She had no qualms. It was as if she had been dedicated for a long time to this moment. She was familiar at once with the strange room. When she was ready and summoned him, her voice husky and vibrant, they were like people well-rehearsed in their parts, only their passion real.

Afterwards, and it seemed half a lifetime afterwards, she made her rendezvous, arranged by Sue Rossiter, with the office car. Simpson, the driver, placed a bulky envelope and a box of cigars on the seat beside her. "Personal mail and urgent papers," he explained. "And Miss Rossiter thinks he may be short of his favourite smokes since you're going straight home."

"Meaning that I've smoked them all while he's been away?" There was an edge to her laugh. Simpson seemed to take it in.

"There's no telling what she thinks. But she seems to think of everything."

Damn this Rossiter woman. How right Simpson was. How irked he must be, constantly taking his orders from her. Anyway, what did it matter? Still exultant and reckless Amanda picked up the bulky envelope playfully and said, "I don't know what we should do without our Miss Rossiter, eh, Simpson?"

He accelerated along the fringes of the traffic and had to brake—which in itself gave emphasis to his reply: "I know what I should do."

He then apologised for the braking, and she murmured, "That's all right, Simpson," in a voice that left him with the feeling that he had over-stepped the mark. A glance in one of his mirrors, however, showed him that the office envelope had spilled out across the seat. She was putting back the contents, taking her time, but rather awkwardly because of one letter she held in her left hand . . .

Viktor's writing on the envelope, marked PERSONAL with a flourish across the top. It was not stamped.

And why not? Why shouldn't he be writing personally to Nigel? Why shouldn't a letter from him be urgent enough to be delivered by hand and forwarded in this special dossier? She fingered it, felt tempted to open it. Unreasonably outraged, jealous, as if Viktor in some way was breaking trust. Then, still holding his letter, she lost herself in a long think about him.

Simpson, through the mirror, noticed how she was frowning and was afraid she had been really upset by his comment on the

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Rossiter woman. Well, hardly comment. Sort of snort it had been, leaving no doubt about whose side he was on. But was it possible that Rossiter would have the face to write something personal to the Boss, knowing that his wife was taking the envelope along to the airport? Simpson sighed heavily and said aloud in a fatuous comforting voice, "Won't be long now."

She started. "No. Not long, Simpson." What on earth was he talking about? She thrust the letter, unopened, down among the other papers in the envelope. "I hope the flight's on time," she said, just to keep up the meaningless patter.

"Miss Rossiter checked at lunch time, and again before I came to pick you up. She's nothing if not thorough." That, thought Simpson, sort of squared up the Rossiter angle as far as he was concerned. In his job, he often told himself that loyalty was second only to a clean licence.

Amanda sank back into her snug corner. "Miss Rossiter, as you said, thinks of everything."

And while Sue Rossiter was indulging her passion for efficiency, checking flight times, she, Amanda, had been in Viktor's bed. That at least was something outside the smooth schedule.

Smooth schedule—that was how it went. The meeting with Nigel, the family news, the presents from New York, the celebration drink, the homecoming. Finally after supper, the mock-reluctant leisurely opening of the bulky envelope. "May as well find out what's going on, darling."

She delayed taking away the coffee cups until he came to Viktor's letter, opened it and yawned.

"Saw Viktor while you were away, Nigel. He came along to talk shop."

"So I heard." He yawned again. "Sue mentioned that he'd been around."

"She thinks of everything."

Silly to say that, and in that tone of voice. Worse than silly; she might have thrown a bomb at Nigel. He let Viktor's letter fall to the floor. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

She didn't know. She just wanted to laugh it off and retreat with the cups. The telephone came to her rescue. It was Rossiter herself. Nigel was thanking her for calling and saying, Yes, there were one or two notes he would give her right now, though he had not been through all the stuff.

Amanda switched on the fluorescent lighting in the kitchen which Viktor had called her "anxiety-free nourishment laboratory," and heard the office-intimate conversation with Sue Rossiter. She did not listen to its detail but suddenly fancied overtones

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in what was being said. Wasn't that, after all, what Simpson, without putting anything into words, had implied? The notion swaddled her like velvet as she stood in the aseptic light. When she went back without waiting for him to finish, she was smiling. She heard him say, "Telephone Viktor and say I will meet him before lunch, say at twelve-fifteen . . ."

When he put down the telephone she said, "That's what I meant about Sue thinking of everything. She has to. She has to think for you doesn't she?"

He yawned for the third time. "Picking a quarrel, Amanda?"

They did not quarrel. They just went to sleep with the jagged edges of irritation which somehow salved her guilt and for Nigel brought self-righteous repose.

After that almost casual rite of self justification, proving to herself that she could remain unscathed, unblemished by her affair with Viktor, she allowed herself to be carried away. At least twice a week they met, without first lunching in public now. He had provisions brought in, more than enough so that she could choose and enjoy her cherished art of culinary surprise. Cooking, eating and love intermingled. A domestic ritual: a temple of otherness, togetherness, magically opened on these chosen days. Closed afterwards with sighs of tenderness.

She indulged herself always with the notion of an affair between Nigel and the Rossiter woman. She took no trouble to find out about it, and Viktor, though she convinced herself that he knew about it, never offered so much as a hint. Nigel continued to speak of Sue with detached possessiveness like a captain speaking of his ship. But then, he might well use such a tone when he spoke appreciatively in some company of his own wife.

The temple rocked a little when the children came back for the holidays. Meetings with Viktor became irregular, sometimes hasty. A new element entered their relationship—Viktor's intense curiosity about the children. He insisted on hearing every detail of their life at home, their attainments of which she was so proud, their shortcomings which she preferred to conceal, how Nigel loved them, spoilt them, and tended to show them off. Was this jealousy? She was used to intricate, unpredictable patterns in Viktor's mentality and behaviour. His impassioned concern with her children, the children she shared with Nigel, was baffling.

Then, after the holidays, when they were together again he said, "I want children from you too."

"Don't be absurd, Viktor."

"I am serious. I have lived for this." The mahogany glow of

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his eyes lost their lustre, their poetry, and became so commanding that she quailed. In the silence that followed she withdrew into herself.

"Impossible, Viktor. You demand the impossible." She tried to laugh, but it was no good.

"Your life with Nigel could terminate," she heard him saying and she cringed at that hard alien word.

"No, no, no . . . the children." She whispered.

"They adjust so easily at that age."

"And Nigel too. Nigel would . . ." She could not go on. What would Nigel do?

"He is invulnerable. You must surely realise that, or must I explain it?"

O God, he was going to say something about Angel Face! "No. No. Explain nothing." She withdrew herself from Viktor, then flung herself back into his arms. "Don't do this to me, my Viktor."

His voice was hard. "It is a crisis which is bound to come. I care too much now to go on with an afternoon affair. We are committed. We can no longer take part in a mere culinary romance. We've grown up now. We begin to live in a new dimension." His body did not reject her: and she just clung on, speechless beneath the icy fall of his neat phrases, logical, intimate, for her alone.

And now she was alone, stripped, exposed to this crisis.

"I should have known," she managed to say at last.

"You must have known for a long time."

"I suppose I have . . ." She went across the room and stood by the window as she had done after she had first touched his lips. Instead of the safe solid terrace and the flower beds in the rain she was looking down on fast moving traffic in a wet one-way street. A stranger to herself once again, she heard herself saying. "It will have to be a break now. A clean break."

"As you wish. If . . . if you say so . . ." Incredibly, catastrophically his voice was caught in a sob as he came and stood very close, but did not touch her.

She dare not turn even to look at him. Over her shoulder as she went to the door, she said, "I must say so. I must. A clean break, Viktor. The only way." She stopped in the open doorway, the thump of her heart deafening her. "But not now. We're not ourselves. We owe it to each other to say goodbye. I mean properly, not shocked as we are now."

"Long speech, Amanda. Shocked, yes, I suppose we are. Too good to be true, the whole thing. Feel today. Talk tomorrow."

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"Day after tomorrow, Viktor. I'll ring you."

They arranged to meet at the place where they had lunched with Hiven. "But don't invite him this time," she said, fearing for a moment that Viktor might garnish the occasion with that extravagant touch.

"We shall be alone and quite simple," Viktor assured her. "Alone in the crowd."

They had unwound by that time. Amanda had suffered a run-down of despair and had come to some sort of terms with herself. She could stand this process of a farewell meeting so long as it was fringed with formality. And so long as he spared her his own feelings. Her part of the ritual was one of contrition. A self-imposed penance, no matter what suffering would follow.

He sensed this and was gentle, self-controlled. "We must remember this with pleasure, Amanda."

"And everything, everything, for me, Viktor, with gratitude." This she said at the end, her hands already gloved, gripping his.

They exchanged a kiss of acquaintanceship as they went out. "I shall walk," he said.

"In this rain, Viktor?"

He shrugged, turned up his jacket collar, pirouetted, bowed and danced a few capers down the steps and into the rain, and the effort of life went out of her. The ritual ended; the contrition broke. She waved aside the doorman with the cab, and crossed the road like a sleep-walker. Viktor would never be aware of this vigil, this silent last possession of him as she threaded through the crowds watching him on the other side of the street.

It lasted for five minutes or so, and he was only a few blocks short of his office when he paused, turned down his collar, ran his hand through his hair, squared his shoulders and pushed the swing doors of the Café Etoile. Amanda tried to force herself to walk on aimlessly through the rain, but she felt cheated.

She had meant to indulge herself by seeing the last of him, choosing her moment of yielding possession, before he came to the grandiose impersonal chromium and glass entrance to his office block. She reached the island in the street and hesitated again, carefully judging the right break in the traffic.

Through Etoile's long window she saw him again, moving purposefully among the tables to where Sue Rossiter had half-risen to greet him. He pushed her back on to the red plush of the bench seat and sat very close beside her, both of them laughing. Then he tweaked her ear, rather cruelly.

They sat in silence, while he gripped her wrist, laying his finger along her forearm.

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What is being brave if you're not frightened first?

The POT

by ALAN DIPPER

KENNY WILLIAMS loved his mum and she loved him, which put them both in a minority of two in the whole district. Ma had one of those overpowering figures and a voice to go with it. She could winkle Kenny out of Spy-glass Alley, half a mile from their back gate, just by calling *"Keneee!"* like the six o'clock dockyard hooter, and it would jerk young Ken back to his dinner or tea as though she had him tied on a bit of rope. She was a bullying woman; we were all dead scared of her and our parents hated her guts because they were scared, too—that's the sort of thing kids notice.

Kenny's old man had been a brickie and a good one, but none of us ever knew him. He lasted long enough to get our Ken and she buried him up the Island; then, like the old-fashioned Sheppey women, she put on black (jet beads and all) and stayed in it even when she married again.

Kenny's step-dad was called Harry Baring. He was really big, big enough to make

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a kid gasp when he first saw him. He was quiet and peaceful and in the demolition game—I once saw him pick up a front porch pillar a customer wanted and put it down gently in the lorry. He didn't puff and pant and roll it about, although it must've weighed three hundredweight, but picked it up and put it down without thinking. They said he must have done something like that to Ma, because the only time she was quiet was when he was around; then she trotted about seeing after him with her trap shut like a nun. Harry had a boy called Georgie by *his* first marriage, a nice kid very like his dad, a couple of years younger than most of us lot but game for anything. Ma didn't go much on him because of Kenny, but she was good to him.

Kenny? Well, we put up with Kenny because kids are like that; they don't fry their brains worrying about whether someone's black or white, nice or nasty. It's *there*, like pudding, and you've got two chances—you eat it or you don't.

Kenny was bloody horrible—sorry about the language but that kid deserved it. He was about seventeen when all this happened. A tall kid, not bad-looking, but with a sort of sloping, chinless face. He'd got funny eyes, too, hardly any colour to them and with the look a dog has when it's shut up too much. Yet he was cocky as hell until something came up that needed a bit of guts—then you could see he was scared of his own shadow. I don't suppose we did him any good. Ever since our mums first let us out on our own we played tricks on him. I remember we once took him into the old range tunnels up by Scrapsgate and left him to get out by himself. Took him from dinner to teatime and it's black and wet in there. We'd follow him home from school, too, shouting things—you know kids—but we had to watch out for Ma. She loved him if no-one else did. He'd run home blubbering and out she'd come after us. Most of our dads were navy or yard men; they knew the value of discipline and they knocked it into us, but Ma was like a shipload of CPOs rolled into one.

The girls that hung about with us were no better or worse than most. They were nearly all sisters of our mates anyway and as we grew up we generally

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got married to them, some because we'd wanted to and some because we'd had to. Our island girls were a pretty practical lot when it came to sex and they'd taught us, or made believe we'd taught them, most things before we'd left school—but not Ken.

Like everything else real he was scared of girls. On summer evenings they'd share us out between them and we would stroll down the canal bank and horseplay would start and we'd run and roll and leap like lambs; it would all die down and we'd be whispering in pairs in the grass. Then it always happened that Kenny's girl would get fed up doing nothing and walk away and upset everyone else because she was cross. Ken, after boasting to us about what he was going to do to her, would as like as not try to slip off back to his mum with us calling names after him.

Then Natalie came. Her dad was an N.O. posted from Chatham. Only Stores, but an honest-to-God officer. From the first she wanted to be with us rather than the Commissioned Quarters kids. There was no rivalry, you understand, and no-one kept us kids apart; it was just that we naturally drifted into two bands.

Natalie at seventeen was beautiful. Full of go and devilment and love, and in a couple of weeks she had us all by the ears and led us where she liked. We lads got tired of fighting each other for her. She never let anyone touch her but for going out she chose whom she liked and changed when she liked—but never Kenny. She wasn't nasty to him; she just didn't know he was there. He was gutless, you see, and she was—well, it's silly to talk about it now but I've never met anyone like her since. Nothing scared her; I know now that she had that rare gift of seeing people and things as they really are. She was as tall as the boys (and we breed long men) and strong, and kind to the snotty-nosed toddlers who were foisted on us by our overworked mums.

The only time she ever noticed Ken was once when we were playing the tide game. Straight offshore from the town the tide goes out over the flats for a mile, and the game was to be out there just as it started to flow and try to be the last ashore. When there was a wind behind it the water moved like an express train. We could only play at night or we were seen and chased off by the Council beach man. It was a frightening and stupid thing to do but great fun.

This night Kenny, who was silly in love with Natalie, tried to show off and got himself caught on a bank about thirty yards offshore. He was in such a state that he couldn't get the nerve to take his clothes off and swim in with the current. He just stood

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and whimpered with the water above his knees. We went for a boat after calling him a few names, but Natalie could see he was in real trouble and she swam straight out, shoved him off the bank and lugged him ashore. She chased him up the sea wall and off to his ma, and stood there against the town lights with her dress plastered on her like a skin. We all looked up at her and the boys were silent and slowly moved off on their own. If they felt like me their stomachs were knotted up with God knows what feelings, desire and love, and something very like awe mixed with it.

I've gone on about Natalie so that you can see how strange was what happened afterwards.

Away from the town down towards Queenborough there was an old deserted brickworks with a couple of three-hundred-foot chimneys. Harry Baring, Ken's step-dad, heard that the site was bought and was to be cleared and he put in a quote for the job. He promised us lads weekend and evening work if he got it, and we were mad keen because the latest craze was to try and get proper sailing boats instead of the couple of old clinker-built sieves we knocked about (and generally sank) in. We weren't, as usual, clubbing together; it was everyone for himself—save every penny—because young Natalie had said she liked sailing. Obviously the first one to get a boat got her to himself whenever she felt like a sail. For most of us, earning a few quid a week or apprenticed at the yard, we might as well have been saving up for a spaceship, but when you're seventeen you don't think that way.

Anyway, Harry was undercut by a London firm on the dropping of the big pots. They quoted a stupid price and, as Harry said, the only way to make anything would be to do without jack ladders and go up inside. After nearly a hundred years of kiln heat and neglect the inside ladders would be like tissue paper. Jack ladders? Well, if you want to build a house you put up scaffold and that costs a lot. If you want to get up somewhere really high and steep you put up steeple-jack ladders, bolted into the brick with steel pegs. In the case of dropping a pot you unship the ladders in sections as you come down. It's a very expensive rig.

The Council wouldn't let the pots be dropped whole, or blown, so whoever did the job would work on the nine-inch brick rim and cut away from under his own feet.

One Saturday night we were all in The Black Cat Café down by the station. Natalie was sitting on the one and only pin-table machine with a cup of coffee in one hand, beating time to Joe

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Skinner's battered old guitar with the other and looking like a princess. The rest of us, about a score I suppose, were dancing or talking or snogging in corners. Cathy, the owner, slopped about behind the counter in a mess of coffee and bits and pieces of food. It was a dirty café but we didn't mind because Cathy put up with anything we did. She was a West Indian and had a black flat face like a long-playing disc with a nose stuck on, and she loved noise.

Anyway, in walked Kenny. I suppose his Ma had helped him to buy the rig-out and he looked like something from Carnaby Street. The girls were always smart but we boys were not a dressy lot—leather jackets and pullovers mostly—and Kenny really showed up. The noise died down, then we all started wolf-whistling and walking about with our hands on our hips. He took no notice, just walked up to Natalie and asked her to dance —and she did. Then he sat talking to her in his cocky way about how he was going to buy a boat that Mr. Andrews, the Assistant Superintendent at the yard, had for sale. It was a little beauty of a craft, too, built in the yard, and sailed like a gull. Andrews wanted one hundred and fifty quid for her and would probably get it.

We let him go on for a bit then we really set in to torment him. By the time we'd finished he was crying real tears; then he said, "All right, you lot, but by the end of the month I'll buy her," and he turned to our Natalie and said, "I invite you to have first sail."

I said she was kind to toddlers. She patted his arm and said, "Yes, of course I will, Kenny," then he got up, went to the door and turned back to us. He looked at Natalie and said, "I swear it—" and went out.

Well, I suppose he was desperate. He knew how we felt about him, poor lad; he'd had time enough to find *that* out. It wasn't, I suppose, only that he wanted to do as he'd boasted. It was deeper. He would have to get the boat all right, but he also had to do it some way to prove to all of us and Natalie that he was a hero. Poor little bastard.

Years later Kenny himself told me the lot, but at that time I got the first bit of the story from my uncle, who was a policeman, and the rest came out in court.

He'd gone straight off and found the agent in charge of the brickworks, and offered to drop the big pots for a hundred quid each. It was a ridiculous price—well under the London firm's quote. Still, the agent knew he was Harry's stepson and assumed that Harry was behind it, and Baring was a man respected all

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over Kent for doing a good job. So he gave Kenny the contract. Even now I can't think why he didn't check up on it, but it was Saturday night and he wanted those pots down in a hurry.

The next morning Kenny got up at five, woke his step-brother Georgie, who was a kid as game as a Jack Russell after rats, took a set of tools out of the shed, and they both nipped over to Queenborough. It was dead early and Sunday morning, so no-one was likely to disturb them, but as they stood under the first pot and looked up she seemed to go up through the sky and out the other side.

Kenny's plan was simple. He reckoned to undercut the pots and drop them across the yard. It was a safe enough plan if you knew what you were doing. The Council was being fussy about the vibrations affecting the sea wall, but Kenny reckoned that once the pots were down and no damage done they wouldn't hold it against him. He'd already fixed up with a chap who drove a bulldozer to tidy them up into piles in the afternoon.

Working as he did with Harry Baring, he had the know-how, but he'd forgotten one thing. Half-way up the southern pot was a great band of steel, and from two hooks in this, four-inch hawsers stretched over to the main fabric of the works roof. This had been done years ago when a gale had rocked the chimney. The hawsers of course had to be cut before the pot could be dropped and the only way up was inside, and out through small boarded-up windows made in the chimney for inspecting the hawser hooks. Kenny had sense enough to know that he shouldn't cut the cables until he was ready to drop the chimney. With the cables gone it could have gone down as he started to undercut.

The step-brothers got out the picks and sledges, and Kenny squinted up the pot and across the yard, then marked the cutting points with chalk—Harry had taught him well.

After a couple of hours' work he saw that not much held her and he could cut the hawsers. Up to now he had not thought much about this part of the job. He crawled back inside through the flue and looked up. The rusty ladders tapered away into darkness; far away a plate-sized disc of light showed the dawn sky. Even by the flashlight set in his steel helmet he could only just see the frail iron gallery at the level of the inspection holes. He felt dizzy; he *couldn't* do it—his guts twisted at the thought.

Georgie crawled through the flue, said, "Come on, Ken," and went up the ladder like a squirrel. Kenny followed slowly, forcing each foot to the rung above; the chimney stank of sour wet soot, filth fell on him, kicked off the walls by Georgie's

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cheerful feet. Fifty feet up he clung grey-faced to the iron and couldn't go on, then he thought of Natalie and crowing over the rest of us, and climbed steadily . . .

Whatever might have been said about him later, at that moment he was as brave as anyone can expect to be—what is being brave if you're not frightened first?

When he reached the gallery he sprawled on the floor in a state of collapse, hands twitching, useless for the work that was to be done. Georgie had knocked out the boards from the inspection slits and was already at work on the first hawser.

"Come on, Ken," he said excitedly, "look, the holding pins are rusted through, we can knock 'em off with the mallet."

As the first cable sang away into the depths the whole chimney lurched and trembled. Kenny squealed with fear and dived for the ladder. "Georgie!" he shouted, "Georgie, come down, she's going!" and he dropped down rung after rung, forgetting his fear of the ladder in this greater fear. Something clanged above him, and Georgie's voice echoed through the chimney.

"Ken, *Ken*, stop! The bloody ladder's broke and I'm stuck."

Kenny jerked his head up and hung panting and sweating. By the helmet-light he saw Georgie's small figure crouched on the platform; below, an eight-foot section of ladder sagged slowly downwards away from the bare wall.

"Ken," said Georgie, and his voice was very steady, "come up as far as you can, and hang outwards. I'll hang on the last rung and drop. You can catch me easy."

As he spoke there was a sound like a single clear note from an enormous organ, and the pot swayed to the north, then very slowly up and over to the south. The second hawser had gone and Kenny knew in one appalling moment that the deadly arc would increase until the whole three hundred feet crumpled to the ground.

Again Georgie shouted from above, the pot weirdly echoing his alarm, "Kenny, she's *going*. Come and catch me. Oh, Kenny, *hurry!*"

There was a blank, confused time full of falling bricks and soot and noise and Kenny found himself on the edge of the brickfield, his arms gripped by two policemen and screaming up into their faces, "Georgie, oh, Georgie!"

The pot shimmered and fell. It fell like a thing in a dream, slowly at first, then so fast the eye blurred. Fell keeping its shape, every brick apparently in place to the last terrible moment of the smash, exactly along the line planned by Kenny.

I was in court for the coroner's hearing, and so was most of

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the town. Those who couldn't get in stood quietly outside in the rain. Whatever we thought of Ma, Harry Baring was a popular man. He carried a mighty bat for the Cricket Club, would give anyone a helping hand and was a staunch member of the local Masons' Lodge. He sat on the hard bench staring straight ahead, and nobody spoke to him.

Everyone concerned had given their evidence. The agent had been properly criticised for lack of care in checking Kenny's *bona fides*, and most of us wondered what *they* were. Kenny himself sat squashed next to his Ma, shivering.

As yet all that was known was that two lads had mucked about with the big brickyard pot and it had fallen, killing one of them. The Coroner said what a tragedy it was, and meant it, and then coaxed Kenny to the front of the Court. He was very gentle.

"Come along, Kenneth," he said, "it's my job to find out what happened and you must help me. I know how you must feel."

It seemed like an hour before Kenny spoke, then he lifted his head up and looked round the Court with those funny eyes of his, and started in a low muttering voice. We were all so quiet we heard every word, the whole story, right up to when he left Georgie and fled down the ladder. By the time he finished he was screaming the words almost incoherently. "I had to get the money, they laughed at me and I love her. Oh, God, Georgie, Georgie, I tried to go up but I couldn't—he shouted at me all the way down . . . he kept calling me—" His voice stopped as though a steam valve had slammed shut.

The silence was complete. Then, "You left him to die," said the Coroner flatly.

That did it. Everyone was shouting, Harry stood up towering above the people with such anger in his face that they made a clear space round him, then again silence. You could hear Kenny crying; he held out his hands towards Ma, and cried, "Mum, Mum." She looked at him; her large handsome face showed no emotion at all, but the heavy pillow-like bosom heaved. She walked firmly over to Harry, took his arm and led him out of the building; the people parted in front of them like the sea from a boat's prow.

Kenny's voice rose to a shriek: "Mum, don't leave me, don't leave me—*Mum!*"

Then incredibly Natalie, driven by God knows what illogical female love, walked over to him, and took his arm. I was the only one near enough to hear her speak. "Don't worry, Kenny, love," she said, "I'm here, I'll look after you." © Alan Dipper 1966

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HOW'S YOUR READING?

A quick quiz to test what you know about great authors and the books they've written

1 Which authors began but failed to complete the following novels: (a) *The Watsons,* (b) *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,* (c) *The Sense of the Past*?

2 Who was Mary Ann Evans?

3 Complete the following titles: (a) *The Girls of —— Means,* (b) *The —— of the Matter,* (c) *The —— of Love.*

4 What was the name of E. M. Forster's last novel, and when was it published?

5 What were the Christian names of the three Brontë sisters?

6 How many men went boating up the Thames with Montmorency?

7 Which character gives its name to a novel in which it plays the lead without actually appearing?

8 Which two cities does Charles Dickens write about in *A Tale of Two Cities*?

9 Did Sir Winston Churchill ever write a novel?

10 Spot the mistake: (a) *The Figs of Wrath,* by John Steinbeck, (b) *A Farewell to Music,* by Ernest Hemingway, (c) *The Locust Eater,* by Penelope Mortimer, (d) *The Lion,* by Giuseppe di Lampedusa, (e) *The Spy Who Came Inside,* by John le Carré.

11 How many novels did Jane Austen complete?

12 What time did Rupert Brooke's church clock stand at when there was (was there?) "honey still for tea"?

answers are on page 102

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On this last summer day, a sense of unexplained happiness filled the air . . .

IN THE MIST

by Yury Kazakov

A HIGH, tense, urgent pounding rang out in the mist. Someone in the distance was hammering on metal and the sound was rounded and drawn out: *tioo-tioo-tioo.*

"Hear it?" asked Kudryavtsev.

"Hu-hu. Means we've come the right way after all," replied the agronomist. "Let's have a smoke."

He sat down at once, put his gun on the ground and rolled over to get at his back pocket for his cigarettes.

Kudryavtsev, a mechanic, had been out shooting with the local agronomist, but they had been unlucky. They had stood at the evening duck-flight for hours, staring at the west until their eyes ached and it was almost dark. Then, in the fields, they were caught in a thick mist, and forced their way through bushes, squelched through mud and rustled through reeds, finally losing their way. But as soon as they heard the hammering they knew that it came from the workshops near the collective farm and, immediately reassured, stopped for a smoke.

"See any stars?" asked Kudryavtsev; he was short-sighted.

"No," the agronomist said presently. "It's a good thick mist. But I expect the sky is clear."

He lay flat on his back, wheezing and now and then taking a deep pull at his cigarette.

Kudryavtsev, a mechanic, had been out shooting with the slapped his thigh, breathing fast through his nose.

"What is it?" the agronomist asked.

"I don't know . . . I feel happy all of a sudden . . ." He laughed. "Shall we have a drink tonight?"

"Definitely." The agronomist came to life. "I keep thinking about that duck. I'm sure I hit it. It's a shame we

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couldn't find it. And you say that you didn't see me hit it?"

"No, all I saw was you dashing into the reeds and the water spouting up higher than your head," laughed Kudryavtsev.

"Oh, you never see anything! There were three of them flying over the wood along the bank. I was a hundred feet away. Two flew over but the third one dropped, plumb into the reeds. If only we'd had a dog!"

The metallic pounding, softened by the distance, continued to ring in the mist, and Kudryavtsev fell silent, overcome by his sudden, unaccountable joy. "Can it be the mist?" he thought fuzzily. "Or the evening out shooting? Or the hammering—it's nice to think of people nearby."

He thought of his wife with whom he seemed to have quarrelled for good. They had had a row and he had ceased to notice her existence, keeping silent for days on end and going out in the evening to drink with the agronomist or the tractor drivers. One look at her resigned face was enough to put him in a rage and make him say terrible things to her, which hurt him as well.

But now it was all over, it was all dissolved, and he wanted to be good and everyone around him to be charming and gay.

"Well, let's go." The agronomist got up. "Pity we didn't get anything. A bit of duck makes a good snack..."

"I'm glad we went, all the same," said Kudryavtsev following him and watching his enormous back.

Now they walked on boldly, talking in loud voices about the summer, the heat, the harvest on the other farms. They came to a road. It was slick from the rain of the day before, the first rain in a very long time. The heat had lasted all through the summer. Corn, flax, clover, peas, everything was burned. The exhausting stillness of the drought had hung over the fields and the dust had lain three inches thick on the roads.

Now, at the end of August, the sun had little strength left and the heat was more an appearance than a reality. There was something feverish about the countryside, something bitter, furtive and urgent, as if it were an Indian summer.

By now the nights were misty, cold and heavy with dew. The moon rose above the trees and the mist, red and seeming near the earth. But the summer had held on, baking and dusty, until finally, the day before, there had come abundant rain and hail, and immediately the autumn had advanced, with the first yellow leaves showing on the trees, and lonely roads, overgrown with plantain, kindling reddish-brown.

Three days earlier, when Kudryavtsev had last walked along

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this road, the rusty-coloured flax shot with chocolate-brown on top had tinkled, rustling dryly in the wind. But by now it was all picked, and the birch and aspen thicket smelled like a steam bath and the flax field like a laundry.

"You know," Kudryavtsev addressed the agronomist's back, "I feel like a boy, I could jump up and down. It was when I heard that hammering, the mist was all around and I was looking at you—you lit a cigarette—that's when it came over me."

"What came over you?" The agronomist, puzzled, stopped to let Kudryavtsev catch up with him.

"Happiness I suppose . . ." Kudryavtsev said uncertainly, as if amused at himself. "It's like sometimes in autumn—in the most abominable weather, suddenly there's a pale-blue rift in the clouds, and you look at that blue and at the puddles lighting up on the road, and you remember all the springs and all the happiness you've ever had."

"Mm . . . yes." The agronomist became thoughtful. "Living is remembering . . . I should have gone on looking . . ."

"What did you say?"

"I said I should have gone on looking for that duck."

They were nearing the farm and they realised that the reddish light they had seen was a flickering camp fire.

The fire was near the workshops. Tractor drivers in their greasy overalls were sitting around it, their long shadows falling in different directions. A caterpillar tractor with a broken track stood nearby, its muddy sides glossy like velvet and the track gleaming. Three men were busy on it. One lay underneath with only his legs showing; two stood in their own light, hammering and pulling at the track which kept slipping off.

"Hi, boys! Want any help?" Kudryavtsev called out, his heart warming to these men at work in the dark.

"Who's that? Oh, hello!" The one under the tractor looked out. "No, we'll be through in half an hour."

"Done Kharitonov's section yet?" asked the agronomist, lighting his cigarette at the fire.

"Well, we started on time," someone said after a silence.

"Better look out," the agronomist warned. "The regional committee representative will be here tomorrow night."

The two men stood about, watching the fire and enjoying the smell of the oil and petrol, then they went on. On the outskirts of the village they reversed their guns, pointing them downwards, and quickened their pace.

Kudryavtsev was still in his joyful mood; he had stopped

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feeling tired, and he thought with ever more affection of his wife: as soon as he got home, they would make it up.

"You know," he said, "I won't go out tonight. I don't really feel like drinking."

"Hm . . . Suit yourself." The agronomist was surprised.

They were coming to the club house and the hoarse music of a gramophone reached them more and more distinctly. A bright light hung over the porch.

"Shall we cross over?" suggested Kudryavtsev.

"It's light enough as it is," grunted the agronomist, pulling down his cap over his eyes.

There were couples sitting on the benches or standing by the fence beside the club. For some reason, they were all silent and they all turned and watched the two approaching men.

"Killed anything, comrade agronomist?" asked a voice.

"Only his feet," another said, and everyone laughed.

"You might at least have got a teal," the agronomist said a little later, puffing with embarrassment.

The two friends parted near Kudryavtsev's house.

"So you won't drop in?" the agronomist paused.

"No, I'll stay at home . . ."

"Well . . . be seeing you . . ."

Kudryavtsev stood in the porch, smoking and scraping his shoes against the step. His gun shoulder was sore but his body felt light. "Happiness! . . ." he thought. "But why?"

It's natural if you're in love, or if you're lucky and successful, if your work and everything is going well and moving on—then everything is clear and you don't have to dig inside yourself. But why is it that at the darkest, the most hopeless moment, there's a flash and your heart begins to pound, and afterwards you remember it for a very long time? . . . What a lovely night and how good to be alive!

"Zoya!" he called his wife. "Come out here a moment."

And while she was looking for something inside the house, her heels thudding softly, and then opening the door to join him in the porch, he kept clearing his throat as he breathed in the cool mist and the strong sharp smell from the potato patch, and listened to the distant music from the club and thought about the tractor drivers working by the red light of the fire.

"Look, what a mist," he said to his wife, putting his hand on her warm shoulder. "See any stars?"

For some reason he wished he could see some stars.

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Translated from the Russian by Manya Harari and Andrew Thomson

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Fer de Lance

BY JOHN SALT

DAISY Patricia Eudoxie O'Donnell was a thorn in the flesh of both the parish priest and the port medical officer at Blanchisseuse. She was a tall, raw-boned girl, the eldest daughter of an Irish ship's engineer who had spent the last years of an exhausting life in the island.

Having very little to leave in the way of wordly goods, Phelim O'Donnell had bequeathed to his best-loved daughter a roving eye, a chronic cough and his own simple but enthusiastic belief in the help which Providence might be expected to provide for those who were not above helping themselves.

Daisy was no beauty by any standards, what with her long bones and ungainly, gangling stride, but there was that in her which fetched the men and caused a certain monotony in the matter of her confessions to Father Heflin. This, of course, was between the priest and his God, but he made no secret of his displeasure at Daisy's behaviour and was supported strongly in his disapproval by Henry Braddon who, as medical officer, was perhaps more specially concerned with the state of the parishioner's body than with that of her immortal soul.

Braddon's task was not easy. He was young enough to be conscientious and deeply in love with his work, but sufficiently old in administrative experience to recognise his severe limitations in explaining to the complacent islanders even the bare essentials necessary to ensure normal good health.

He had, moreover, to deal with a large and floating population, for there were not only the daily comings and goings in the seaport, but also the dwellers in the logging camps scattered untidily behind the town of St. Peter's, whose numbers were shortly to be swelled considerably by an invasion of lumbermen from Honduras.

He was not quite alone in his troubles, for although he and

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Heflin disagreed strongly on points of doctrine, they were also old friends who often worked very closely together, and the problem of one very often turned out to be that of the other also. It was so in the case of Daisy, whose greatest fault might be defined as an excess of good nature. From all points of view she was dangerous to be out, and between them the two men hatched a plot to keep her in.

The health statistics for Blanchisseuse were average Caribbean, that is to say fair to good with some very black spots; but Braddon was worried about the new arrivals and he spent some days preparing a campaign before he spoke his mind to Heflin.

"I'll open an X-ray unit on the quay," he said. "We'll weed out some of the doubtful cases in town first of all and try to isolate them, so that none of the loggers are billeted where there is a record of bad health."

"What about the new men?" the priest asked him.

"We'll screen them as they come ashore and the bad ones can be sent back. Yes, I know what you're thinking, Padre. It's an impossibly tall order, but I've set my mind to it and I hope we shall avoid any serious trouble."

"And Daisy?"

"Ah, Daisy. I was coming to that young lady. I'll take her picture tomorrow. There's nothing much wrong there, you know, but just the same I think we'll soon have Miss O'Donnell into a nice white bed and out of trouble for a while. The rest will do her good, if nothing else."

"Do you think she'll go?"

"She'll go," said Braddon grimly, "if I have to drag her there in person."

"I hope you may be right, Henry," said the priest, but he sighed in the exasperating manner of one who has yet to be convinced.

Daisy spent all her days and most of her nights at the quayside and it was there that a medical orderly found her in the late afternoon of the following day. Miss O'Donnell wore a high-crowned, broad-brimmed straw hat with a short white cotton frock, and her bare feet traced patterns in the dust as she watched a tall ship warping in to the harbour wall. The lines were out and secured to bollards, and water splashed over her dress as the ship crushed the basket-work fenders and came to rest with her rust-streaked side towering over the quay.

The gangway was soon down and the first of the Hondurans trucked gaily down the sloping way. He caught Daisy's eye and

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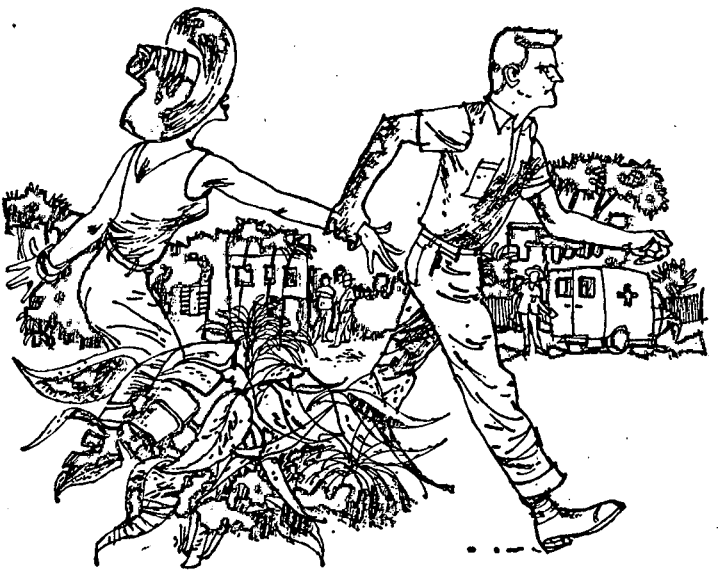

The medical orderly laid an urgent hand upon Daisy

grinned at her, but Miss O'Donnell tossed her head and would have none of him. The next instant, however, her attraction was caught and held by a second man who now reached the quay and shouldered his sea bag. He was tall and thin but very muscular; American blue jean trousers flapped around his long legs, and his chest was covered by a high-necked white vest. He stepped proudly towards the girl.

"Hi, tall boy," called Daisy in a voice like a foghorn, but with caressing intent. "Welcome to Blanchisseuse. How long you staying, man?"

The logger halted and a slow grin bisected his features. "So long as you want me, I'm here," he announced, threw down his bag and prepared to open more intimate conversation.

But in this he was forestalled by the medical orderly, who laid an urgent hand upon Daisy's shoulder and requested her immediate attendance at the Sick Bay. Daisy shook off the offending hand and stood with arms akimbo, flaring her resentment at the orderly. Turning for support to her new friend, Daisy saw that he too was being assisted on his way by a harbour policeman

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and she made off in pursuit, followed by the doctor's messenger.

Heflin, who watched from afar, thought that a fight was in prospect and was surprised to see the logger disappear into Braddon's temporary shed with attendant constable, followed meekly by Daisy and the orderly. He supposed that Braddon was applying the principle of two birds to one stone, and this in fact was so. The medical officer in his white coat stood with a nurse beside the X-ray apparatus, two modern clinical deities, and the sight of so much whiteness and brightness had the effect of quietening both Daisy and the brash lumberman.

The doctor motioned the logger forward and told him to remove his vest. Daisy watched with bulging eyes while the Honduran was weighed and measured. She nodded approval when he gave his name as Max Sullivan.

"I'm Irish too," she said proudly, and Max grinned at her over the frame of the X-ray machine. A long queue had formed outside the hut by this time, but Braddon kept them waiting while he dismissed Sullivan and called Daisy over. The girl was scared, and he took advantage of her unwonted meekness to make a thorough examination and take several pictures.

"I shall want you back here tomorrow," he told her severely. "And if you don't come I shall send for you."

Miss O'Donnell tossed her head, meditated causing a scene, thought better of it and left the building in search of Max, who awaited her outside. Their talk was brief and they barely had time to arrange a meeting for the next day before the logger was whisked back among his companions and marched off with them to the billets where they were to spend the night.

Daisy went home to the rose-walled untidy house which she shared with her mother and half-a-dozen assorted brothers and sisters.

"Where you been, girl?" her mother enquired with a suspicion born of experience. Daisy told her with a wealth of anecdotal illustration.

"You sick?"

Daisy shook her head. "And if I was," she told her mother, "that old machine of Doc Braddon's done me no good. I declare I was on it twenty minutes and feeling just the same when I got off."

The ambulance called for Daisy early next day, long before she could put her clothes on and escape from the house. It was a battle all the way: Daisy fought from room to room and was carried at last from the house, strapped upon a stretcher, to the pious disgust and deep contentment of all the neighbours. It was

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a dreadful come-down, too, for Mrs. O'Donnell, who would greatly have preferred a nice respectable funeral.

Daisy's own chagrin was the deeper for the sight she glimpsed of Sullivan's bewildered face among the onlookers. She wondered how she could ever face him again, for to her mind there was nothing quite so disgraceful as going to hospital. Better the police van any day.

She quietened in the ambulance, however, and the attendants were so far deceived as to loose her bonds when they reached the hospital. Daisy flew from them like a cat and took refuge in a store cupboard, from which she refused to move for many hours. It was Father Heflin who eventually persuaded her to open the door, and by then it was full dark and Daisy a very dusty and tear-stained young lady.

They put her to bed and set a watch upon her, but at the end of the week the guard was no longer necessary, for Braddon, having examined her X-ray plates, threw medical caution to the winds and came to see Daisy with the express intention of putting the fear of God into her, an exercise in which Father Heflin had been markedly unsuccessful.

"Six weeks on your back," he told her. "No fights and no nonsense. You stay here with us and we'll look after you."

Daisy's scared eyes peered darkly at him over the sheets which, with unusual modesty, she had pulled to her chin, and Braddon relented a little. "Don't worry, you are going to get well. But you have to rest, that's all."

Then he got up and walked from the ward past the rows of quiet beds, outwardly brisk and self-assured but inwardly shy and deeply compassionate.

Meanwhile the life of St. Peter's Port in Blanchisseuse went on very much as usual. The loggers marched out of the town and into the forest, where they hacked themselves a clearing and began to cut out the mahogany. They returned at weekends to collect and spend their pay in St. Peter's, and the sound of their revelry carried plainly to where Daisy lay in her narrow bed. Music and laughter were the breath of life to her, and she grew wild and restless when Tambu Billy made the night unholy with his drums.

She thought a lot about Max, and after a day or two the tall logger came to see her, sitting awkwardly beside her bed on a chair that was too small for him. He told her of his life in the forest, and she would lie back in the bed, gently ribbing him and trying to catch him out in what he did at night in the town. For poor Daisy was suffering torments of jealousy. She had no

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doubts about holding her man in the ordinary way, but what could a girl do, laid up in hospital the way she was?

Daisy was secretly glad when the weekends were over and the logger went back to the bush. A man can't come to much harm up there, she thought. And by harm she meant women.

Braddon watched her carefully, and he was worried. She had done very well for the first weeks and he had approved her visitor, but now she seemed to be fretting and her temperature was certainly fluctuating in a most alarming way. He told Heflin about it.

"You are the doctor, surely," said the priest. "How should I tell you what is wrong?"

"I'm not asking your opinion, just telling you the facts," Braddon grumbled.

Heflin shrugged his shoulders. "Daisy is a creature of the wild, and they can never be happy in captivity."

"Nothing more?"

The priest caressed his long dreadnought chin with slender fingers. "I think she might also be in love," he said.

Braddon snorted his derision. "Daisy in love! You must be joking."

But Daisy was in love. Terribly, tearingly in love, and she did not find it by any means a joking matter. Her temperature soared to alarming heights every weekend when the men came home, and did not subside until the sound of singing and the shuffling of many feet told her that they were marching past the hospital and back to the trees. This went on for five weeks until the day of the snake, and after that she felt that she would never draw another peaceful breath until she was clear of the hospital.

The snake was *lachesis lanceolatus,* a fer de lance, and its victim a logger at the camp, a friend of Max Sullivan's. Disturbed from noon-day sleep, it struck with the speed and accuracy of its kind, taking the man neatly in the ankle, and thereafter it sped undulating into the green jungle. The lumberman caused the hospital very little trouble, being dead upon arrival, but the manner of his passing shocked Daisy into high fever.

Braddon now became seriously disturbed about her, and at first returned a flat refusal to Daisy's tearful and repeated pleas for freedom. But later he began to reconsider his decision, and talked the case over again with Heflin.

"There's nothing wrong with her that rest can't cure. The trouble is dormant and will remain so while she takes life easily."

"And is she taking life easily?"

The doctor reflected gloomily and shook his head. "No," he

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said. "She is getting worse while I watch. Damned if I know what to do for the best. Sometimes I think she would be better off at home, but there's no telling what she'd get up to, left to her own devices."

"You have a very short memory," Heflin told him drily, and went out again in the late afternoon heat to complete his rounds in the town.

In the end, as so often in the past, it was Daisy herself who clinched matters. She had spent a day considering ways and means and had decided that her best plan would be to make for the camp and set up a home of sorts there for Max. In that way she could prevent him from getting into trouble in St. Peter's and also keep an eye open for his safety at work.

To think was to act with Daisy, and she picked a time in the mid-morning when Braddon was out and the nurses busy in other wards to bully a young orderly into fetching her clothes. Dressed once again in the familiar wide hat and short cotton dress, Daisy Patricia Eudoxie, a trifle light-headed but very determined, swept out of the hospital and took to the hills.

At about the same time, a dried yellow branch moved and took on life in the jungle undergrowth, hidden from the sight of men but within the sound of their voices and the ringing of their axes upon the hard wood. It was high noon and the snake stretched his five-foot length to bask a moment in the rays of strong sunlight which needled the deep green beneath the trees. Then, with efficiency and smooth purpose, the fer de lance moved towards the clearing, bearing death cradled gently in his jaws.

Daisy was glad of her hat by the time she reached the savannah and had begun to climb towards the timber. Still giddy from weeks in bed, she swayed a little but shook herself impatiently and planted her broad feet more firmly upon the ground, eager to reach the camp.

The thin sound of a steel guitar and the odour of wood smoke were wafted towards her and she quickened her pace. She might have been fifty yards away when the snake struck Max, and that is a long way to bring succour when a man has been bitten by a fer de lance.

Daisy heard the shriek, saw Max fall, and watched the group around him scatter like pasteboard figures in a gust of wind. Then she was among them and could see Max rolling upon the ground with both hands pressed tightly to a spot on his lower thigh just above the right knee.

She threw herself down beside him and tore his hands away

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from the wound. The flesh around the punctures was already swelling and discoloured. Sullivan had dropped his machete in the grass beside him. Daisy snatched it up and slashed deeply into the flesh above the punctures. Blood ran fast into the earth, but she cut again, across and across, this time into the bite itself. Then she cast the blade aside and knelt to draw the venom from the wound.

Max lay almost unconscious in a spreading pool of blood, and it was the foreman logger who tore off his own bright shirt to knot a tourniquet for Max's leg. Max began to moan faintly through clenched teeth; he shivered violently and his face was grey. A group gathered around him, shaking doubtful heads, but one driver had the wit to race for his lorry and back it over the rough ground so that Sullivan's body could be lifted on to it. Daisy scrambled up beside him and cradled his head as the driver drove like a madman across the stump-strewn clearing to the main road into St. Peter's.

Max was still breathing when they carried him into the hospital, and Braddon, suffering himself from a bout of relapsing fever contracted the year before in Guiana, wrapped a wet towel about his head and took over at once. Daisy was restrained by main force from following the stretcher into the operating theatre, but was allowed to remain just outside in an ante-room, where she sat crooning softly to herself while a nurse gently sponged her face and mouth.

Braddon worked steadily for hours, fighting his battle against snake venom, shock and loss of blood. When he knew that he could do no more, he went wearily out to Daisy and told her that her man would live. She nodded chirpily as if she had never had any doubt about it, but her eyes were sombre as she watched Sullivan's quiet body wheeled past on a stretcher table, and she made no demur when the nurses led her back to the bed she had quitted earlier that day in such high hope.

Braddon passed an aching hand over his streaming forehead and walked to the shower room, willing himself to reach it before collapse. His exhaustion began to pass after a meal and a cigarette. He felt in the mood to talk with Father Heflin, who had arrived at the hospital during the operation and now sat smoking his pipe on the verandah, where the wire mesh shutters had been latched-to against the evening mosquito.

Braddon looked out for a moment on the mist-hung lawn where the fireflies danced to a cicada orchestra, then came and stretched himself in a lay-back chair and gazed at the priest with shadowed eyes.

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"What news?" Heflin asked him. "The matron told me you did a fine job. My congratulations to you."

"Thank you, padre. Well it's good news, of course. There's bound to be a lot of fever; he'll feel deathly ill, and he's likely to walk dot-and-carry-one for the rest of his life. But at least there is no doubt at all in my mind that he will live."

He struggled up from the long chair and began to pace up and down restlessly, but after a few turns came back to face Heflin.

"God alone knows how he got away with it," he said almost accusingly. "According to the book he should have been dead a good four hours ago."

"Just so," Heflin said pacifically. "God alone knows these things."

"Yes, but that's just it, don't you see," Braddon burst out. "It's little short of a miracle, like everything else on this confounded island where everything grows too fast and flowers too soon. Here we have a man with an indifferent medical history, bitten by one of the most venomous reptiles in the world. Then a woman with a shadow on her lung sucks out the poison, after first half-amputating his leg with a machete which has been used to clear jungle undergrowth. And after all that the man is going to live."

Father Heflin nodded a judicial head. "Yes," he said. "You might very well call that a miracle. Something performed by the Almighty himself, just to show us that he has not forgotten the knack."

"He had a little help from me and blood plasma and the sulfa drugs," said Braddon irritably.

"Also made by the Almighty," countered the priest.

"He made the snake, too, didn't He?"

"He made all things," replied Heflin, who saw rapids ahead and made to change the current of the conversation. "Tell me," he went on. "What does Daisy think of this small miracle?"

Braddon chuckled wickedly. "She knocked that one on the head. You won't like it."

"Try me."

"Well, when I told her that Sullivan would live she said, as nearly as I can reproduce it, 'I knew that, Doc. Be-Jasus, there ain't no old snake ever hatched can take a man away from Daisy O'Donnell. Not when she's set her mind on having him'."

Heflin stood and shouted with laughter. Braddon looked at him with surprise.

"Aren't you mad?"

"Why should I be? She is perfectly right in what she says. The

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Lord helps them who help themselves: her father taught her that long ago. Sorry Henry, I must leave you now. There are some things I must attend to."

"Work at this hour?"

"More a pleasurable duty. I have a wedding to arrange."

"Anybody I know?"

"Daisy and Max. Hadn't you heard?" Heflin walked to the door and paused to tap his pipe out against the step. "You know, the trouble with you, Henry, is that you are only half a doctor and you forget that I am the other half. You may arrange the pieces conveniently to hand, but it is I who put them together."

Braddon stood short of an answer as the priest stumped away into the night. Then, as the matron came out of her office, he said absent-mindedly, "We'll have to chalk that one up to the Padre."

"What did you say, Doctor?" she asked him, puzzled.

"Nothing, Matron, nothing. Just a game we play. Lead on, will you?" said Henry Braddon, and followed her back into the main building to begin his nightly round of the wards.

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John Salt, aged 44, lives in rural Hertfordshire with wife Paula and two children, Linden, 14 and Nicholas, 11. Started life as a farmer's son in coastal Essex. Diverted to journalism after war service in small boats with Royal Navy which took him to West Indies—hence stories like *Fer de Lance*. Worked eight years on a Fleet Street evening newspaper, in complete contrast edited a glossy magazine for seven. Now involved in magazine production. Wrote first short story—about a gondolier with transistorised false teeth—ten years ago, claims *Argosy* as his first publisher. Hobbies: wine, criminology, reading the works of Raymond Chandler. Secret ambition: to reach the standard necessary to pass the Eleven-plus like his children.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ON PAGE 88

1(a) Jane Austen, (b) Charles Dickens, (c) Henry James. 2 George Eliot. 3(a) *Slender,* (b) *Heart,* (c) *Pursuit.* 4 *A Passage to India;* in 1924. 5 Charlotte, Emily and Anne. 6 The three men in Jerome K. Jerome's boat were George, Harris and J.; Montmorency was the dog. 7 *Rebecca,* by Daphne du Maurier. 8 London and Paris. 9 Yes: *Savrola,* published in 1900. 10(a) *The* Grapes *of Wrath,* (b) *A Farewell to* Arms, (c) *The* Pumpkin *Eater,* (d) *The* Leopard, (e) *The Spy Who Came* in From the Cold. 11 Six. 12 Ten to three.

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A THREE-MINUTE TALE by RICHARD AWDRY

I HAD been Mr. Figg's chauffeur since the day he founded Hayes and Figg the business efficiency firm, and after thirty years I knew exactly how thin was the relationship between him and Mrs. Figg, how proud he was of his son Edward, how deeply he despised his ex-partner, Ernest Hayes.

On long journeys, Mr. Figg often talked of the need for a clear-cut purpose in life. "Like a good chauffeur, Robbins, one should always know where one's going." When he spoke of the folly of drifting, I knew he was thinking of Ernest Hayes.

Why Ernest Hayes became involved in business efficiency is more than I can say: his own life was less efficient than anyone's I've heard of. He founded Hayes and Figg with Mr. Figg, but he left after two years because he said he didn't like staying anywhere too long. Mr. Figg went from strength to strength, but Ernest Hayes zigzagged: he was a seaman, a cattle drover, curator of a museum in Aden, a window cleaner in Mayfair. He lived in a basement room in Paddington and often dropped in at Hayes and Figg for a chat. He didn't seem to realise that Mr. Figg disliked having his co-founder turning up in odd socks and a frayed suit, looking as if he'd slept on the Embankment.

Ernest Hayes was a thorn in Mr. Figg's flesh, but I don't think he'd have minded so much if Ernest Hayes had been miserable. Mr. Figg was happy because his work absorbed him from breakfast till midnight. It didn't seem right that aimless Ernest Hayes should also be happy. In Mr. Figg's opinion, people who didn't care about work should suffer.

After thirty years I didn't expect Mr. Figg to surprise me, but he did. He said: "Robbins, I'd be grateful if you'd join the public library and lend me your tickets. They only let you have three books at a time, and I'm engaged on some research."

It seemed a thin story, but I wasn't paid to wonder. I went to the library and looked at the librarians. If Mr. Figg was after one of them, I wouldn't have blamed him. He and Mrs. Figg had nothing in common: they were both precise, but in different ways. Mr. Figg lived only for his work, while Mrs. Figg played

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bridge and did fine needlework. But, if anyone was breaking them up, I didn't think it was one of the quiet, library ladies.

I took the tickets to the office, and after lunch the mystery thickened. I found four books on the back seat of the car: *Home Woodwork, The A to Z of Philately, Know Your Footballers,* and *Rug-Making Explained.* On the way home that evening, Mr. Figg seemed restive. He pretended to read reports, but he kept catching my eye in the driving-mirror. He said: "It's no good, Robbins. You'll have to know. I'm sixty-four and a half."

"Yes, sir?"

"In six months I'm going to retire."

"Retire, sir?" Mr. Figg was one of the most vigorous men I knew. "You don't want to retire, sir."

"I promised Edward I'd leave when I was sixty-five."

"I'm sure Mr. Edward—"

"I want him to have an innings as good as mine. At his age I'd been managing director for five years already. But I tell you, Robbins, the prospect of idleness is driving me mad. I've worked all my life, I've never developed other interests. All I care about is efficiency. I only like travelling when it's a business trip; games, music, art aren't really for me. So I'm ransacking the hobbies shelves at the library for something to do." He laughed bitterly. "I should have been more like Ernest Hayes."

Over the next couple of months, Mr. Figg went from bad to worse. He read books on budgerigar breeding, conjuring tricks. He began to look haggard, and I doubted if he'd last a year in retirement. His wife didn't look too good, either. Clearly, the prospect of sharing a future with a gloomy, inactive Mr. Figg was giving her nightmares. Then we heard the news. Ernest Hayes had died very suddenly and peacefully in hospital.

I drove Mr. and Mrs. Figg to the funeral. Edward Figg was abroad, or he would have come too. Mr. Figg was very silent: he had a low opinion of Ernest Hayes, but they had worked together, and a part of Mr. Figg's own history had gone.

After the funeral we went to Paddington. Ernest Hayes had no relatives and as his oldest associate, Mr. Figg had volunteered to dispose of the effects. He said: "You'd better come too, Robbins, we may need to shift things."

The room was like a jackdaw's nest. There were books, papers, diaries, bills, stuffed birds and old clothes. "Typical," Mr. Figg said. "We'll just burn the lot." He picked up a red notebook. "His old laundry lists. You've got to be pretty muddle-headed to keep old laundry lists." He read out: "'*November 1937. Three pairs of khaki shorts.*' Why would he wear shorts then?"

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Mrs. Figg said, "Didn't you say he once went to Aden?"

"That was before the Abdication. Maybe 1937 was the year he went to Australia."

Mrs. Figg said, "This stuffed fish is marked *Great Barrier Reef, 1933*."

"All right, so he didn't wear khaki shorts in Australia in 1937. Unless he made a second trip . . . wait a minute! Here's a map of Brazil. I wonder if he went there in 1937 and wore khaki shorts? Poor old inefficient Ernest. What a muddler. I don't suppose he knew himself where he wore khaki shorts in 1937."

Mr. Figg was looking brighter than I'd seen him for many weeks. He said: "Robbins, there's no need for you to stay. Mrs. Figg and I may be a long time, so we'll take a cab. Now Lizzie, I said I'd dispose of the effects, and dispose of them I will. You look through those diaries. Anything about 1937, put on the table. I'm going to get to the bottom of those khaki shorts."

That day marked the break between Mr. Figg and the firm, because he came to the office only once more to hand over some keys, the car, and myself to his son Mr. Edward. Mr. Figg had found something to do—getting Ernest Hayes' life into order even after Ernest Hayes had left it. He searched among the jumble in that Paddington room, documenting, cross-referencing, dating, interviewing people. Some of the diaries recorded journeys, and Mr. Figg followed them to verify facts. The last time I saw him, he had been to see the proprietor of the Jubilee Café in Nuneaton who remembered someone like Ernest Hayes ordering fried fish for lunch in 1949.

We met in the library, after I had received a card saying that my tickets had expired and should be surrendered. Mr. and Mrs. Figg were there, working as a team. They both looked bronzed and fit and forty. They were poring over an atlas, checking a trip that Ernest Hayes had made, driving cattle from Werribee to Adelaide. "We've booked a boat for Melbourne. We sail next month," Mr. Figg said. "We've already got eighty thousand words in our dossier."

I said: "When will you finish it, sir?"

Mr. Figg said: "Never. My son Edward's got no more resources than I had. When he retires, carrying on with the Life and Times of the firm's co-founder will keep him off the streets."

"So it'll be a long time before it's published, sir?"

"It'll never be published," Mr. Figg said. "Who wants to read about an obscure man like Ernest Hayes? Who wants to know that he had fish for lunch in Nuneaton in 1949?"

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CONTINUING OUR EXCLUSIVE SERIALISATION OF THE BOOK EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

WHEN EIGHT BELLS TOLL

BY ALISTAIR MACLEAN

THE helicopter was completely out of control, lifeless in the sky. It wasn't going to be in the sky much longer, but there was nothing I could do about it. I braced myself for the jarring moment of impact when we struck the water, and when the impact came it was not just jarring, it was shattering to a degree I would never have anticipated. We'd landed not in the water but on the encircling reef.

I tried to get at the door but couldn't make it, we'd landed nose down and facing seawards on the outside of the reef and from the position where I'd been hurled under the instrument panel the door was above and beyond my reach. I was too dazed, too weak, to make any real effort to get at it. Icy water poured in through the smashed windscreen and the fractured floor of the fuselage. For a moment everything was as silent as the grave, the hiss of the flooding waters seemed only to emphasise the silence. Then the machine-gun started again. The shells smashed through the lower after part of the fuselage behind me and went out through the top of the windscreen above me. Twice I felt angry tugs on the right shoulder of my coat and I tried to bury my head even more deeply in the

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freezing waters. Then, due probably to an accumulation of water in the nose and the effect of the fusillade of bullets aft, the helicopter lurched forwards, stopped momentarily, then slid off the face of the reef and fell like a stone, nose first to the bottom of the sea.

My ballooning head felt as if it were being pumped full of compressed air, my ears and eyes ached savagely, my nostrils, mouth and stomach were full of sea water and my bursting lungs felt as if someone had filled them with petrol and struck a match.

The damned door was jammed. After the beating the fuselage had taken, first of all in smashing into the reef and then into the sea-bed, it would be a miracle if it hadn't jammed. I pushed the door, I pulled at it, I beat at it with my clenched fists. It stayed jammed. The blood roared and hissed in my ears, the flaming vice around my chest was crushing my ribs and lungs, crushing the life out of me. I braced both feet on the instrument panel, laid both hands on the door handle. I thrust with my legs and twisted with my hands, using the power and the leverage a man can use only when he knows he is dying. The door handle sheared, the thrust of my legs carried me backwards and upwards towards the after end of the fuselage and suddenly my lungs could take no more. The air rushed out through my water-filled mouth and nostrils and I sucked in this one great gasping breath, this lungful of sea-water, this last I would ever take.

It wasn't a lungful of water, it was a lungful of air. Noxious compressed air laden with the fumes of petrol and oil, but air for all that. It had been trapped in a pocket under the undamaged upper rear part of the helicopter's fuselage, the only part of the place that hadn't been riddled by machine-gun bullets.

The water level was around my neck. I took half a dozen deep whooping breaths, then pushed myself backwards and upwards to the extreme limit of the fuselage. The water was at chest level now. I moved a hand around in the blind darkness to try to estimate the amount of air available to me. Impossible to judge accurately, but enough to last for ten to fifteen minutes.

I moved across to the left of the fuselage, took a deep breath and pushed myself forwards and downwards. Eight feet behind the pilot's seat was the passenger door, maybe I could force that. I found it right away, not the door but the opening where the door had been. The impact that had jammed the door on the right-hand side where I'd been had burst this door open. I pushed myself back to the upper part of the fuselage again and helped myself to a few more deep breaths of that compressed air.

Now I knew I could go at any time, I was in no hurry to leave.

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The story so far: PHILIP CALVERT, British naval intelligence agent, is investigating ship disappearances off the west coast of Scotland. Aboard the hijacked *Nantesville*, Calvert encounters thugs, but escapes. Back on his own boat, *Firecrest*, a disguised marine survey vessel, Calvert and his mate, HUNSLETT, are visited by the thugs, posing as Customs officers. Under the pretence of searching the ship the thugs wreck one transmitter, but leave a concealed one intact. After their departure, Calvert reports to his London chief, an admiral known as UNCLE ARTHUR, who gives Calvert 48 hours to find the *Nantesville* and agrees to send him a helicopter. Next morning, SIR ANTHONY SKOURAS, owner of the nearby luxury yacht, *Shangri-la*, comes aboard, complaining that his transmitter, too, has been wrecked. Calvert accepts an invitation to visit the *Shangri-la*, where he meets Skouras' business associates and his ill-treated second wife, CHARLOTTE. On his helicopter search the following day, Calvert flys over the island of Craigmore, where TIM HUTCHINSON and his shark fishermen live, and visits the island of Dubh Sgeir, home of LORD KIRKSIDE and his daughter SUE. Returning that evening, Calvert's helicopter is shot down.

Up above, guns in hand, those men would be waiting. They could only have come there by boat and that boat would have been very nearby. By this time it would be even nearer by, it would be sitting directly over the spot where the helicopter had gone down; and the crew wouldn't be sitting around with drinks in their hands congratulating themselves on their success, they'd be lining the side with searchlights or flashes and waiting to see if anyone would break surface.

The question was not how long they would wait but how long I could wait. Or had I already waited too long? I could feel the panic in my throat like some solid lump in my windpipe completely obstructing my breathing and had to make a conscious physical effort to force it down. How long had I been under water? Six minutes—seven? Not less than seven. I couldn't reckon on less than ten minutes. The lump was back in my throat again.

How deep was I? That was the life-or-death question. I could tell from the pressure that I was pretty deep. But how deep? Ten fathoms? Fifteen? Twenty? God above, I might even be in twenty-five fathoms. If I was, well that was it. Finish. How did the decompression tables go again? At thirty fathoms a man who has been under water for ten minutes requires to spend eighteen minutes for decompression stops on the way up. Even

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at twenty fathoms I'd require a six-minute halt for decompression on the way up and if there was one certain fact in life it was that decompression stops were out for me. I'd be a broken man. What I did know for certain was that every additional second I remained there would make the bends all the more agonising and crippling when they finally struck. All at once the prospect of surfacing beneath the steady guns and the pitiless eyes of the men above seemed positively attractive compared to the alternative. I took several deep breaths to get as much oxygen as possible into my blood-stream, exhaled to the fullest extent, took a long final breath to fill every last cubic millimetre in every last nook and cranny in my lungs, dived under the water, pushed my way out through the doorway and made for the surface.

I'd lost count of time on the way down and I now lost all count of time on the way up. I swam slowly and steadily, using enough power to assist my progress through the water, but not so much as to use up all the stored oxygen prematurely. Every few seconds I let a little air escape from my mouth, not much, just enough to ease the pressure in my lungs. I looked up, but the waters above me were as black as ink. And then suddenly, quite some time before the air supply was exhausted and before my lungs had begun to hurt again, the water was a shade less than pitch black and my head struck something hard and unyielding. I grabbed it, held on, surfaced, sucked in some lungfuls of that cold, salt, wonderful air and waited for the decompression pains to start, those sharply agonising twinges in the joints of the limbs. But none came. I couldn't have been more than fifteen fathoms down and even then I should have felt something. It had probably been something nearer ten.

During the past ten minutes my mind had taken as much of a beating as any other part of me, but it would have to have been in very much poorer shape than it was for me not to recognise what I was clinging to. A boat's rudder, and if any confirmation had been required the milkily phosphorescent water being turned up by the two slowly turning screws a couple of feet ahead of me would have been all that was required. I'd surfaced right under their boat. I was lucky. I might have surfaced right under one of their propellers and had my head cut in half.

Off to port I could see, sharply illuminated by a couple of powerful lights from the boat's deck, the reef where we'd crashed. We were about forty yards away and, relative to the reefs, stationary in the water, the engines turning just enough to maintain the boat's position against the effect of wind and tide. Now and again a searchlight patrolled the dark waters all around. I

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couldn't see anything of the men on deck, but I didn't have to be told what they were doing—they were waiting and watching and the safety-catches would be off. Nor could I see anything of the boat itself but I made up my mind that, even though I couldn't recognise it, I'd know it if I ever came across it again. I took out the knife from the sheath behind my neck and cut a deep vee notch in the trailing edge of the rudder.

For the first time, I heard voices. I heard four voices and I had no difficulty in the world in identifying any of them.

"Nothing on your side, Quinn?" Captain Imrie, the man who had organised the manhunt for me aboard the *Nantesville*.

"Nothing on my side, Captain." I could feel the hairs rise on the nape of my neck. Quinn was "Durran", the bogus Customs officer. The man who had almost, but not quite, strangled me to death.

"Your side, Jacques?" Captain Imrie again.

"Nothing, sir." The machine-pistol specialist. "Eight minutes since we've been here, fifteen since they went under. A man would require pretty good lungs to stay down that long, Captain."

"Enough," Imrie said. "There'll be a bonus for all of us for this night's work. Kramer?"

"Captain Imrie?" A voice as guttural as Imrie's own.

"Full ahead. Up the Sound."

I thrust myself backwards and dived deep. The waters above my head boiled into turbulent, phosphorescent life. I stayed deep, maybe ten feet down, heading for the reef. How long I swam like that, I don't know. Certainly less than a minute, my lungs weren't what they used to be, not even what they had been fifteen minutes ago; but when I was forced to the surface, I'd my dark oilskin over my head.

I needn't have bothered. I could see the faintly shimmering outline of the disappearing wake, no more. The searchlights were extinguished; when Captain Imrie decided a job was finished, then that job was finished.

I turned and swam slowly towards the reef. I reached a rock and clung to it until a measure of strength returned to my aching muscles, to my exhausted body. I would not have believed that fifteen minutes could have taken so much out of a man. I stayed there for five minutes. I could have stayed there for an hour. But time was not on my side. I slipped into deep water again and made for the shore.

Three times I tried and three times I failed to pull myself up from the rubber dinghy over the gunwale of the *Firecrest*. A boy

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of eight could have done it. But not Calvert. Calvert was an old, old man.

I called out for Hunslett, but Hunslett did not come. Three times I called, but he did not come. The *Firecrest* was dark and still and lifeless. Where the hell was he? Alseep? Ashore?

The fourth time I made it. For a few seconds, dinghy painter in hand, I teetered on my stomach on the edge of the gunwale, then managed to drag myself aboard. I secured the painter and went in search of Hunslett. There were words I wished to have with Hunslett.

I never used them. He wasn't aboard. I searched the *Firecrest*, but no Hunslett. No signs of a hasty departure, no remnants of a meal on the saloon table or unwashed dishes in the galley, no signs of any struggle, everything neat and in good order. Everything as it ought to have been. Except that there was no Hunslett.

For a minute or two I sat slumped on the saloon settee trying to figure out a reason for his absence, but only for a minute or two: I was in no condition to figure out anything. Wearily I made my way out to the upper deck and brought dinghy and outboard over the side. I deflated the dinghy and stowed it, along with the outboard, in the after locker. And if someone came aboard and started looking? If someone came aboard and started looking he'd get a bullet through him.

I went below. I felt sick. I stripped off my clothes and towelled myself dry and the very action of towelling seemed to drain away what little strength was left to me. I was sick, but the sickness was in the heart and mind, not in the body.

I went into my cabin and laboriously dressed myself in fresh clothes, not forgetting the Paisley scarf. The rainbow-coloured bruises that Quinn had left on my neck had now swollen and spread to such an extent that I had to bring the scarf right up to the lobes of my ears to hide them. I looked in the mirror. It might have been my grandfather staring back at me. My grandfather on his death-bed.

In the saloon I poured myself a stiff three fingers of whisky. It went down my throat like a ferret down a burrow after a rabbit, one moment there, the next vanished in the depths. The weary old red corpuscles hoisted themselves to their feet and started trudging around again. It seemed a reasonable assumption that if I encouraged them with some more of the same treatment they might even break into a slow gallop. I had just closed my hand around the bottle when I heard the sound of an approaching engine, and took up position behind the open saloon door.

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I was pretty sure the precautions were unnecessary—ten to one this was Hunslett coming back from shore, but why hadn't he taken the dinghy, still slung on the davits aft? The motor-boat's engine slowed, went into neutral, astern, then neutral again. A slight bump, the murmur of voices, the sound of someone clambering aboard and then the engine opening up again.

The footfalls passed over my head as the visitor made his way towards the wheelhouse door. The springy confident step of a man who knew what he was about. There was only one thing wrong with that springy confident step. It didn't belong to Hunslett. I flattened myself against the bulkhead, took out my Luger, slid off the safety catch and prepared to receive my visitor.

I heard the click as the wheelhouse door opened, the louder click as it was shut by a firm hand. A pool of light from a flash-lamp preceded the visitor down the four steps from the wheelhouse to the saloon. He paused at the foot of the steps and the light moved away as he made to locate the light-switch. I stepped round the door and did three things at once—I hooked an arm around his neck, brought up a far-from-gentle knee into the small of his back and ground the muzzle of the Luger into his right ear. Violent stuff, but not unnecessarily violent stuff; it might have been my old friend Quinn. The gasp of pain was enough to show that it wasn't.

"This isn't a hearing-aid you feel, friend. It's a Luger pistol. Don't make me nervous. Put that light switch on with your left hand. Slowly. Carefully."

He was very slow, very careful. The saloon flooded with light.

"Raise your hands above your head. As high as you can reach."

He was a model prisoner, this one, he did exactly as he was told. I turned him around, propelled him into the centre of the room and told him to face me.

He was of medium height, nattily dressed in an astrakhan coat and a fur Cossack hat. He had a beautifully-trimmed white beard and moustache, with a perfectly symmetrical black streak in the centre of the beard, the only one of its kind I had ever seen. The tanned face was red, either from anger or near-suffocation. From both, I decided. He lowered his hands without permission, sat on the settee, pulled out a monocle, screwed it into his right eye and stared at me with cold fury. I gave him look for look, stare for stare, pocketed the Luger, poured a whisky and handed it to Uncle Arthur. Rear-Admiral Sir Arthur Arnford-Jason, K.C.B. and all the rest of the alphabet.

"You should have knocked, sir," I said reproachfully.

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"I should have knocked." His voice sounded half-strangled. "Do you always greet your guests this way?"

"I don't have guests, sir. I don't have friends, either. All I have is enemies. I didn't expect to see you here, sir."

"Didn't expect to be here myself. Do you know how much bullion was aboard the *Nantesville*?"

"Close on a million, I understood."

"That's what I understood. Eight millions! Think of it, eight million pounds' worth. All this gold that's being shovelled back from Europe into the vaults at Fort Knox usually goes in small lots. For safety. For security. But the Bank knew that nothing could go wrong this time, they knew our agents were aboard, they were behind with their payments, so they cleverly loaded six hundred and fifty ingots without telling anyone. Eight million. The Bank is hopping mad. The government is hopping mad. And everyone is taking it out on me."

I said: "You should have let me know. That you were coming."

"I tried to. You failed to keep your noon-day schedule. The most elementary of crimes, Calvert, and the most serious. You failed to keep a schedule. You or Hunslett. Then I knew things were going from bad to worse. I knew I had to take over myself. So I came by plane and RAF rescue launch. Where's Hunslett?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm afraid he may have been removed by force. I'm not sure how. What have you been doing in the past two hours, sir?"

"Explain yourself." I wished he'd stop screwing that damned monocle into his eye. It was no affectation, that monocle, he was nearly blind on that side, but it was an irritating mannerism.

"That RAF launch that dropped you off here just now. It should have been here at least two hours ago. Why didn't you come aboard then?"

"I did. We almost ran the *Firecrest* down in the darkness as we came round the headland. No-one here. So I went and had some dinner. Nothing but baked beans aboard this damned boat as far as I could see. I had smoked trout, *filet mignon* and an excellent bottle of hock. I dined aboard the *Shangri-la*." This with the slight hint of a smile.

"The *Shangri-la*?" I stared at him, then remembered. "Of course. You told me. You know Lady Skouras well. No, you said you knew her very well and her husband well. How is my old Sir Anthony?"

"Very well," he said coldly.

"And Lady Skouras?"

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He hesitated. "Well—"

"Not so well. Pale, drawn, unhappy, with dark smudges under her eyes. Not unlike myself. Her husband mistreats her and mistreats her badly. Mentally and physically. He humiliated her in front of a group of men last night. And she had rope burns on her arms. Why would she have rope burns on her arms, Sir Arthur?"

"Impossible. Quite fantastic. I knew the former Lady Skouras, the one who died this year in hospital. She—"

"She was undergoing treatment in a mental hospital. Skouras as good as told me."

"No matter. She adored him. He adored her. A man can't change like that. Sir Anthony—Sir Anthony's a gentleman."

"Is he? Tell me how he made his first millions. You saw Lady Skouras, didn't you?"

"I saw her," he said slowly. "She was late. She didn't look very well and she'd a bruise on her right temple. She'd fallen climbing aboard from the tender and hit her head against a guard-rail."

"To get back to the first time you boarded the *Firecrest* this evening. Did you search it?"

"I searched it. All except the after cabin. It was locked. I assumed there was something in there you didn't want chance callers to see."

"There was something in there that callers, not chance, didn't want *you* to see," I said slowly. "Hunslett. Hunslett under guard. They were waiting for word of my death, then they'd have killed Hunslett or kept him prisoner. If word came through that I hadn't been killed, then they'd have waited until my return and taken me prisoner, too. Or killed us both. For by then they would have known that I knew too much to be allowed to live. It takes time, a long time, to open up a strong-room and get all those tons of gold out and they know their time is running out. They're desperate now."

"They were waiting for word of your death," Uncle Arthur said mechanically. "I don't understand."

"The helicopter you laid on for me, sir. We were shot down tonight after sunset. The pilot's dead and the machine is at the bottom of the sea. They believe me to be dead also."

"I see. You go from strength to strength, Calvert. When we get back to London remind me to show you my confidential report on you."

"Yes, sir." So this was how it was coming.

"I was having dinner with the Undersecretary just forty-eight hours ago. One of the things he asked me was which country had the best agents in Europe. Told him I'd no idea. But

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I told him who I thought, on the balance of probabilities, was the best agent in Europe. Philip Calvert."

"That was very kind of you, sir. You were going to fire me thirty-six hours ago."

"If you believe that," Uncle Arthur said calmly, "you'll believe anything. One of the comments in your report states: 'Unsuitable for routine investigation. Loses interest and becomes easily bored. Operates at his best only under extreme pressure. At this level he is unique.' It's on the files, Calvert. I don't cut off my right hand."

"No, sir. Do you know what you are, sir?"

"A Machiavellian old devil," Uncle Arthur said with some satisfaction. "You know what's going on?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pour me another whisky, my boy, a large one, and tell me what's happened, what you know and what you think you know."

He heard me out, then said: "Loch Houron, you think?"

"Loch Houron it must be. I spoke to no-one else, anywhere else, and to the best of my knowledge no-one else saw me. Someone recognised me. Or someone transmitted my description. By radio. It must have been by radio. The boat that was waiting for the pilot and myself came from Torbay, a boat from Loch Houron could never have made it to the eastern end of the Sound of Torbay in five times the time we took. Somewhere near here, on land or sea, is a transceiver set. Somewhere out on Loch Houron there's another."

I rose, pulled back the saloon curtains on both sides, then sat down again.

"Why did you pull those curtains back?"

"Some time tonight people will be coming aboard. Hunslett and I, those people think, are dead. At least, I'm dead and Hunslett is dead or a prisoner. But they can't leave an abandoned *Firecrest* at anchor to excite suspicion and invite investigation. So they'll come in a boat, up anchor, and take the *Firecrest* out into the Sound, followed by their own boat. Once there, they'll slice through the flexible salt-water cooling intake, open the salt-water cock, take to their own boat and lift their hats as the *Firecrest* goes down.

"The scuttling party may be coming from anywhere and they may not come for hours. But if someone comes panting hotfoot aboard soon after those curtains are opened, then that will be proof enough that the radio transmitter we're after, and our friends who are working the transmitter, are somewhere in this bay, ashore or afloat."

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"How will it be proof?" Uncle Arthur said irritably.

"They know they have Hunslett. I can't think of any other reason for his absence. They think they know I'm dead, but they can't be sure. Then they see the beckoning light in the window. What is this, they say to themselves, Calvert back from the dead? Wouldn't you come panting hotfoot?"

"There's no need to treat the matter with levity. You should have consulted me first, Calvert." Uncle Arthur shifted in his seat, though his expression didn't change. He was a brilliant administrator, but the more executive side of the business, the sand-bagging and pushing of people off high cliffs, wasn't exactly in his line. "I've told you that I came to take charge."

"Sorry, Sir Arthur. You'd better change that report, hadn't you? The bit about the best in Europe, I mean."

"*Touché*," he grumbled. "And they're coming at us out of the dark, is that it? Armed men. Killers. Shouldn't we—shouldn't we be preparing to defend ourselves? Dammit, man, I haven't even got a gun."

I handed him the Luger. He took it, checked the indicator and that the safety catch moved easily, then sat there holding it awkwardly in his hand.

"The nearest house or boat is a mile away to the east. They'll be pushing wind and tide and they daren't use a motor. Whether they're towing a boat or paddling a rubber dinghy they have a long haul ahead of them. Time's short, sir. We have a lot to do tonight. To get back to Loch Houron . . ."

I thought it was time I went to the upper deck and told him so.

"It won't be long now?"

"I shouldn't think so, sir. We'll put out the light in the saloon here—it would look very odd if they peered in the windows and saw no-one here. We'll put on the two sleeping-cabin lights and the stern light. That will destroy their night-sight. The after deck will be bathed in light. For'ard of that, as far as they are concerned, it will be pitch dark. We hide in the dark."

"Where in the dark?" Uncle Arthur didn't sound very confident.

"You stand inside the wheelhouse. All wheelhouse doors are hinged for'ard and open outwards. Keep your hand on the inside handle. Lightly. When you feel it begin to turn, a very slow and stealthy turn, you can bet your boots, wait till the door gives a fraction, then kick the rear edge, just below the handle, with the sole of your right foot and with all the weight you have. I'll take care of the other or others."

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"How?"

"I'll be on the saloon roof. It's three feet lower than the wheelhouse roof so they can't see me silhouetted against the loom of the stern light even if they approach from the bows."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Clobber him or them. A nice big Stilson from the engine-room with a rag round it will do nicely."

On the upper deck we took up position and waited. It was raining heavily now with the wind from the west. For once the rain didn't bother me, I'd a full set of oilskins on. I just lay there, spread-eagled on the saloon coach-roof, occasionally easing the fingers of my hands, the right round the Stilson, the left round my little knife. After fifteen minutes they came. I heard the gentle scuff of rubber on our starboard side—the side of the wheelhouse door. I pulled on the cord which passed through the rear window of the wheelhouse. The cord was attached to Uncle Arthur's hand.

There were only two of them. My eyes were perfectly tuned to the dark by this time and I could easily distinguish the shape of the first man coming aboard just below where I lay. He secured a painter and waited for his mate. They moved forward together.

The leading man gave a cough of agony as the door smashed into his face. I wasn't so successful, the second man had cat-like reactions and had started to drop to the deck as the Stilson came down. I caught him on back or shoulder, I didn't know which, and dropped on top of him. I brought down my left hand and he lay still.

I passed the other man lying moaning in agony in the scuppers, brushed by Uncle Arthur, pulled the saloon curtains to and switched on the lights. I then went out, half-pulled, half-lifted the moaning man through the wheelhouse door, down the saloon steps and dropped him on the carpet. I didn't recognise him. That wasn't surprising—his own mother or wife wouldn't have recognised him.

"Keep your gun on him, sir," I said. Uncle Arthur was looking down at his handiwork with a slightly dazed expression. "If he breathes, kill him."

In the wheelhouse I picked up a small torch, went outside and shone it down into the water, hooding it with my hand so that the beam couldn't have been seen fifty yards away. They had a rubber dinghy, all right—and an outboard motor attached.

Looping a heaving line round the outboard's cylinder head and hauling alternately on the heaving line and painter, I had both dinghy and outboard up and over in two minutes. I un-

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clamped the outboard, lugged the dinghy round to the other side of the superstructure, the side remote from the inner harbour, and examined it carefully in the light of the torch. There was no mark on it, nothing to indicate to which craft it belonged. I sliced it to ribbons and threw it over the side.

Back in the wheelhouse, I cut a twenty-foot length from a roll of PVC electric wiring-cable, went outside again and lashed the outboard to the dead man's ankles. I searched his pockets. Nothing: I'd known there would be nothing: I was dealing with professionals. I hooded the torch and looked at his face. I'd never seen him before. I took from him the pistol still clutched in his right hand, undid the spring clips holding the guard-chains in place above the gunwale slots for our companionway ladder, then eased, first the outboard, and then the man, over the side. They vanished into the dark waters of Torbay harbour without the whisper of a splash. I went inside, closing wheelhouse and saloon doors behind me.

The injured man was on his feet now, leaning drunkenly against the bulkhead, dabbing his face with a blood-stained towel Uncle Arthur must have found, and moaning from time to time.

"What do we do with him?" Uncle Arthur said.

"Hand him over to the police. But first I'd like to go to the *Shangri-la*. To look for Hunslett."

"I see. To look for Hunslett. Has it occurred to you, Calvert, that if they are hostile to us, as you admit is possible, they may not let you look for Hunslett?"

"Yes, sir. It's not my intention to go through the *Shangri-la*, a gun in each hand, searching for him. I wouldn't get five feet. I'm just going to ask for him, if anyone has seen him. Assuming they are the bandits, don't you think it might be most instructive, sir, to observe their reactions when they see a dead man walking aboard—especially a dead man coming alongside from a boat to which they'd shortly beforehand dispatched a couple of killers? And don't you think it will become more and more instructive to watch them as time passes by with no sign of First and Second Murderers entering left?"

"Assuming they are the bandits, of course."

"I'll know before we say goodbye to them."

"And how do we account for our knowing one another?"

"If they're white as the driven snow, we don't have to account to them. If they're not, they won't believe a damned word either of us says, anyway." Quite suddenly, I wasn't tired any more . . .

Less than two hundred yards from the *Shangri-la* the anchor

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clattered down into fifteen fathoms of water. I switched off the navigation lights, switched on all the wheelhouse lights, passed into the saloon and then I closed the door behind me.

"How long do we sit here?" Uncle Arthur asked.

"Not long. Better get into your oilskins now, sir. Next really heavy shower of rain and we'll go."

"They'll have had their night-glasses on us all the way across the bay, you think?"

"No question of that. They'll still have the glasses on us. They'll be worried stiff, wondering what the hell has gone wrong. *If* they are the bandits."

"They're bound to investigate again."

"Not yet. Not for an hour or two." I heard the sudden drumming of heavy rain on the coach-roof. "It's time to go."

We left by the galley door, felt our way aft, quietly lowered the dinghy into the water and climbed down the transom ladder into it. I cast off. Wind and tide carried us in towards the harbour. Through the driving rain we could dimly see the *Shangri-la*'s riding light as we drifted by about a hundred yards from her port side. Halfway between the *Shangri-la* and the shore I started up the outboard motor and made back towards the *Shangri-la.*

The big tender was riding at the outer end of a boom which stretched out from the *Shangri-la*'s starboard side about ten feet for'ard of the bridge. The stern of the tender was about fifteen feet out from the illuminated gangway. I approached from astern, upwind, and closed in on the gangway. An oilskinned figure wearing one of the *Shangri-la*'s crew's fancy French sailor hats came running down the gangway and took the painter.

"Ah, good evening, my man," Uncle Arthur said. "Sir Anthony is aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wonder if I could see him for a moment?"

"If you could wait a—" The sailor broke off and peered at Sir Arthur. "Oh, it's—it's the Admiral, sir."

"Admiral Arnford-Jason. Of course—you're the fellow who ran me ashore to Torbay after dinner."

"Yes, sir. I'll show you to the saloon, sir."

"My boat will be all right here for a few moments?" The unspoken implication was that I was his chauffeur.

"Perfectly, sir."

They climbed the gangway and went aft. I spent ten seconds examining the portable lead that served the gangway light, decided that it wouldn't offer much resistance to a good hefty tug, then followed the two men aft. I passed by the passage leading to the saloon and hid behind a ventilator. Almost at once the sailor emerged from the passage and made his way for'ard again. Another twenty seconds and he'd be yelling his head off about the vanished chauffeur. I didn't care what he did in twenty seconds.

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When I reached the partly-open saloon door I heard Sir Arthur's voice.

"No, no, I really am most sorry to break in upon you like this. Well, yes, thank you, a small one if you will. Yes, soda, please. Thank you, thank you. Your health, Lady Skouras. Your health, gentlemen. Mustn't delay you. Fact is, I wonder if you can help us. My friend and I are most anxious. I wonder where he is, by the way? I thought he was right behind—"

Cue for Calvert. I turned down the oilskin collar that had been obscuring the lower part of my face, removed the sou'wester that had been obscuring most of the upper part of my face, knocked politely and entered. I said: "Good evening, Lady Skouras. Good evening, gentlemen. Please forgive the interruption, Sir Anthony."

Apart from Uncle Arthur there were six of them gathered round the fire at the end of the saloon. Sir Anthony standing, the others seated. Charlotte Skouras, Dollmann, Skouras' managing director, Lavorski, his accountant, Lord Charnley, his broker, and a fifth man I didn't recognise. All had glasses in their hands.

Their reaction to my sudden appearance, as expressed by their faces, was interesting. Old Skouras showed a half-frowning, half-speculative surprise. Charlotte Skouras gave me a strained smile of welcome: Uncle Arthur hadn't been exaggerating when he spoke of that bruise, it was a beauty. The stranger's face was non-committal, Lavorski's inscrutable, Dollmann's rigid as if carved from marble and Lord Charnley's for a fleeting moment that of a man walking through a country churchyard at midnight when someone taps him on the shoulder. Or so I thought. I could have imagined it. But there was no imagination about the sudden tiny snapping sound as the stem of his glass fell soundlessly on to the carpet.

"Good lord, Petersen!" Skouras' tone held surprise, but not the surprise of a person welcoming someone back from the grave. "I didn't know you two knew each other."

"My goodness, yes. Petersen and I have been colleagues for years, Tony. UNESCO, you know." Uncle Arthur always gave out that he was a British delegate to UNESCO, a cover that gave him an excellent reason for his frequent trips abroad. "Marine biology may not be very cultural, but it's scientific and educational enough. Petersen's one of my star performers. Didn't even know he was here until they told me at Torbay. But dear me, dear me, mustn't talk about ourselves. It's Hunslett. Petersen's colleague. And mine in a way. Can't find him anywhere. Hasn't been in the village. Yours is the nearest boat. Have you seen anything of him, anything at all?"

"Afraid I haven't," Skouras said. "Anybody here? No? When did he disappear, Mr. Petersen?"

"I've no idea. I left him carrying out experiments. I've been

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away all day collecting specimens. No sign of him when I returned."

"Could your friend swim, Mr. Petersen?" the stranger asked. I looked at him, a dark thickset character in his middle forties, with black snapping eyes deepset in a tanned face.

"I'm afraid not," I said quietly. "I'm afraid you're thinking along the same lines as myself. We've no guard-rails aft. A careless step . . . I think I should report this to Sergeant MacDonald."

Everybody else seemed to think so, too, so we left. The cold slanting rain was heavier than ever. At the head of the gangway I pretended to slip, flung my arms about wildly for a bit then toppled into the sea, taking the gangway wandering lead with me. What with the rain, the wind and the sudden darkness there was quite a bit of confusion and it was the better part of a minute before I was finally hauled on to the landing stage of the companionway. Old Skouras was commiseration itself and offered me a change of clothes at once but I declined politely and went back to the *Firecrest* with Uncle Arthur.

As we secured the dinghy I said: "When you were at dinner on the *Shangri-la* you must have given some story to account for your presence here, for your dramatic appearance in an RAF rescue launch."

"Yes. It was a good one. I told them a vital UNESCO conference in Geneva was being dead-locked because of the absence of a certain Dr. Spenser Freeman. It happens to be true. Dr. Freeman is not there because it suits us not to have him there. I told them that it was of vital national importance that he should be there, that we'd received information that he was doing field research in Torbay and that the government had sent me here to get him back."

"Why send the launch away? That would seem odd."

"No. If he's somewhere in the wilds of Torbay I couldn't locate him before daylight. There's a helicopter, I said, standing by to fly him out. I've only to lift the phone to have it here in fifty minutes."

"And, of course, you weren't to know that the telephone lines were out of order. It might have worked—if you hadn't called at the *Firecrest* in the rescue launch *before* you went to the *Shangri-la*. You weren't to know that our friends who were locked in the after cabin when you went aboard would report back that they'd heard an RAF rescue launch here at such and such a time. They might have seen it through a porthole, but even that wouldn't be necessary, the engines are unmistakable. So now our friends know you're lying like a trooper. The chances are that they've now a very shrewd idea as to who exactly you are."

"Our trip to the *Shangri-la* has removed your last doubts about our friends out there?"

"Yes, sir. You saw the reaction of our belted broker, Lord Charnley."

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"A small thing to base a big decision on, Calvert," Uncle Arthur said coldly.

"Yes, sir." I fished my scuba suit from the after locker and led the way below. "I didn't fall into the water by accident. By accident on purpose. I didn't mention that when I was hanging on to the boat's rudder off the reef this evening I cut a notch in it. A deep vee notch. The *Shangri-la*'s tender has a deep vee notch in it. Same notch, in fact. Same boat."

"I see. I see indeed. You forgot to give me advance notification of your intentions."

"I didn't forget." I started to change out of my soaking clothes. "I didn't know how good an actor you are, sir."

"I'll accept that. So that removed your last doubts."

"No, sir. Superfluous confirmation, really. I knew before then. Remember that swarthy character sitting beside Lavorski who asked me if Hunslett could swim? I'll bet a fortune to a penny that he wasn't at the *Shangri-la*'s dinner table earlier on."

"You would win. How do you know?"

"Because he was in command of the crew of the boat who shot down the helicopter and hung around afterwards waiting to have a go at me. I recognised his voice: his name is Captain Imrie."

Uncle Arthur nodded, but his mind was on something else. It was on the scuba suit I was pulling on.

"What the hell do you think you're going to do with that thing?" he demanded.

"Advance notification of intentions, sir. Won't be long. I'm taking a little trip to the *Shangri-la*. The *Shangri-la*'s tender, rather. With a little homing device and a bag of sugar. With your permission, sir."

"Something else you forgot to tell me, hey, Calvert? Like that breaking off the *Shangri-la*'s gangway light was no accident?"

"I'd like to get there before they replace it, sir."

"I can't believe it, I can't believe it." Uncle Arthur shook his head. For a moment I thought he was referring to the dispatch with which I had made the uneventful return trip to the *Shangri-la*'s tender, but his next words showed that his mind was on higher and more important things. "That Tony Skouras should be up to his neck in this. There's something wrong. I just *can't* believe it."

"I'd like nothing better than to arrest the lot of them," I said. "But our hands are tied. We're helpless. But now that I know what we do know, I wonder if you would do me a favour before we go ashore, sir. There are two things I want to know. One is whether Sir Anthony really was down at some Clyde shipyard a few days ago having stabilisers fitted as he told me—a big job that few yards would tackle in a yacht that size. Should find out

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in a couple of hours. People tell silly and unnecessary lies. Also, I'd like to find out if Lord Kirkside has taken the necessary steps to have his dead son's title—he was Viscount somebody or other—transferred to his younger son."

"You get the set ready and I'll ask them anything you like," Uncle Arthur said wearily.

I lowered the false head of the starboard diesel to the engine-room deck as if it weighed a ton. I straightened and stood there for a full minute, without moving. Then I went to the engine-room door.

"Sir Arthur?"

A few seconds and he was at the doorway, a glass of whisky in his hand. "All connected up?"

"I've found Hunslett, sir."

Uncle Arthur moved slowly forward like a man in a dream.

The transmitter was gone. All our explosives and listening devices and little portable transmitters were gone. That had left plenty of room. They'd had to double him up to get him in, his head was resting on his forearms and his arms on his knees, but there was plenty of room. I couldn't see his face. I could see no marks of violence.

I touched his face. It wasn't cold yet. He'd been dead two to three hours, no more. I turned his face to see if I could find how he had died. His head lolled to one side like that of a broken rag doll. I turned and looked at Sir Arthur. The dream-like expression had gone, his eyes were cold and bitter and cruel. I thought of the tales I'd heard of Uncle Arthur's total ruthlessness.

Uncle Arthur said: "Murdered, of course."

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"His neck is broken, sir."

"His neck? A powerful man like Hunslett?"

"I know a man who could do it with one twist of his hands. Quinn. The man who almost killed me."

"I see." He paused, then went on, almost absently: "You will, of course, seek out and destroy this man. By whatever means you choose. You can reconstruct this, Calvert?"

"Yes, sir. Our friend or friends boarded the *Firecrest* very shortly after I had left this morning. They overpowered Hunslett and kept him prisoner. Confirmation that he was held prisoner all day comes from the fact that he failed to meet the noon-day schedule. They still held him prisoner when you came aboard. There was no reason why you should suspect that there was anyone aboard—the boat that put them aboard before dawn would have gone away at once. They couldn't leave one of the *Shangri-la*'s boats lying alongside the *Firecrest* all day. Maybe an hour or so after you departed, the *Shangri-la*'s tender with Captain Imrie, Quinn and company aboard turns up: they report that

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I'm dead. That was Hunslett's death warrant. With me dead they couldn't let him live. So Quinn killed him. They were intending to abandon the boat till they came back at night, at midnight, to take it out to the Sound and scuttle it and someone might have come aboard in the interim."

"I see. And then they said to themselves: 'Where can we hide Hunslett till we come back at midnight? Just in case someone does come aboard.' And then they said: 'Ha! We know. We'll hide him in the dummy diesel.' So they threw away the transmitter and all the rest of the stuff—or took it with them. It doesn't matter. And they put Hunslett inside." Uncle Arthur had been speaking very quietly throughout and then suddenly, for the first time I'd ever known it, his voice became a shout. "How in the name of God did they know this was a dummy diesel, Calvert? How *could* they have known?"

"Someone was criminally careless. I was. The night the two bogus Customs officers were aboard I knew that they had got on to something when we were in the engine-room here. Up to the time that they'd inspected the batteries they'd gone through the place with a tooth comb. After that they didn't give a damn. Hunslett even suggested that it was something to do with the batteries, but I was too clever to believe him." I walked to the work-bench, picked up a torch and handed it to Uncle Arthur. "Do you see anything about those batteries that would excite suspicion?"

"I see nothing," he said curtly.

"Thomas—the Customs man who called himself Thomas—did. He knew what he was looking for. He was looking for a powerful radio transmitter. He was looking for signs of a power take-off from those batteries. He was looking for the marks left by screw clamps or by a pair of saw-toothed, powerfully spring-loaded crocodile clips."

"You make your point well, Calvert."

"No wonder they knew exactly what I was doing today," I said savagely. "No wonder they knew that Hunslett would be alone before dawn, that I'd be landing at that cove this evening. All they required was radio confirmation from someone out in Loch Houron that Calvert had been snooping around there and the destruction of the helicopter was a foregone conclusion. All this damned fol-de-rol about smashing up radio transmitters and making us think that we were the only craft left with a transmitter. God, how blind can you be?"

"I assume that there's some logical thought behind this outburst," Uncle Arthur said.

"That night Hunslett and I were aboard the *Shangri-la* for drinks. I told you that when we returned we knew that we'd had visitors. We didn't know why, then. They came down to the engine-room here. They knew there was a transmitter. They

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looked at that starboard cylinder head. Four bolts—the rest are dummies—with the paint well and truly scraped off. The port cylinder head bolts without a flake of paint missing. They take off this head, wire into the transceiver lines on the output side of the scrambler and lead out to a small radio transmitter hidden, like as not, behind the battery bank there. They'd have all the equipment with them for they knew exactly what they wanted to do. From then on they could listen in to our every word. They figured that it would be a damn sight more advantageous for them to let Hunslett and I have our direct communication with you and so know exactly what was going on than to wreck this set and force us to find some other means of communication that they couldn't check on."

"But why—but why destroy the advantage they held?"

"It wasn't an advantage any longer," I said tiredly. "When they ripped out that set Hunslett was dead and they thought Calvert was dead. They didn't need the advantage any more."

"Of course, of course. They're bound to know that we will find Hunslett the first time we attempt to use this radio. They cannot know how much we know, but they cannot afford to take chances. Not with, what is it now, a total of seventeen million pounds at stake. They will have to silence us."

"Up and off is the only answer," I agreed. "We've been down here too long already, they might even be on their way across now. Don't let that Luger ever leave your hand, sir. We'll be safe enough under way. But first we must put Hunslett, and our friend in the after cabin, ashore."

Perhaps it was because of my total absorption in the job of weighing anchor that I didn't locate and identify the sound as quickly as I might. Twice I'd thought I'd heard the far-off sound of a woman's voice. Then I heard the voice again, much nearer.

"Help me!" The voice was low and urgent and desperate. "For God's sake, help me."

The voice came from the water, amidships on the port side. I moved back silently to where I thought the voice had come from and stood motionless. I'd no intention of helping anyone until I'd made sure the voice didn't come from some dinghy—a dinghy with two other passengers, both carrying machine-guns.

"Please! Please help me! Please!"

I helped her. Not so much because the desperation in the voice was unquestionably genuine as because of the fact that it as unquestionably belonged to Charlotte Skouras.

Quickly I pushed through between the scuppers and the lowest guard-rail a rubber-tyre fender that was permanently attached to one of the guard-rail stanchions and lowered it to water-level. I said: "Lady Skouras?"

"Yes, yes, it's me. Thank God, thank God!"

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"There's a fender at the boat's side. Catch it."

A moment or two, then: "I have it."

"Can you pull yourself up?"

More splashing and gasping, then: "No. No, I can't do it."

"No matter. Wait." I turned round to go for Uncle Arthur but he was already by my side. I said softly in his ear: "Lady Skouras is down there in the water. It may be a trap. I don't think so. But if you see a light, shoot at it."

He said nothing but I felt his arm move as he took the Luger from his pocket. I stepped over the guard-rail and lowered myself till my foot came to rest on the lower part of the tyre. I reached down and caught her arm. Charlotte Skouras was no slender sylph-like figure, she had some bulky package tied to her waist, and I wasn't as fit as I'd been a long, long time ago, say about forty-eight hours, but with a helping hand from Uncle Arthur I managed to get her up on deck. Between us, we half carried her to the curtained saloon and set her down on the settee. I propped a cushion behind her head.

"My dear Lady Skouras, my dear Lady Skouras! What in God's name has happened? Brandy, Calvert, brandy!"

I handed him the glass and said: "If you'll attend to Lady Skouras, sir, I'll finish getting the anchor up."

"No, no!" She took a gulp of the brandy, choked on it and I had to wait until she had finished coughing before she went on. "They're not coming for at least two hours yet. I know. I heard. There's something terrible going on, Sir Arthur. I had to come, I had to come."

"Now, don't distress yourself, Lady Skouras, don't distress yourself. Just drink this down, Lady Skouras."

"No, not that! Not Lady Skouras. Never again! Charlotte. Charlotte Meiner."

One thing about women, they always get their sense of priorities right. There they were on the *Shangri-la*, rigging up a home-made atom bomb to throw through our saloon windows and all she could think was to ask us to call her Charlotte. I said: "Why did you have to come?"

"Calvert!" Uncle Arthur's voice was sharp. "Do you mind? Lady—I mean, Charlotte—has just suffered a severe shock. Let her take her time to—"

"No." She struggled to an upright sitting position and forced a wan smile, half-scared, half-mocking. "No, Mr. Petersen, Mr. Calvert, whatever your name, you're quite right. Actresses tend to over-indulge their emotions. I'm not an actress any longer. I've known for some time that something was very wrong aboard the *Shangri-la*. Strange men have been aboard. Some of the old crew were changed for no reason. Several times I've been put ashore with the stewardess in hotels while the *Shangri-la* went off on mysterious journeys. My husband—Sir Anthony—would

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tell me nothing. He has changed terribly since our marriage—I think he takes drugs. I've seen guns. Whenever those strange men came aboard I was sent to my stateroom after dinner. The last day or two I sensed that everything was coming to a climax. Tonight, just after you were gone, I was sent to my stateroom. I left, but stayed out in the passage. Lavorski was talking. I heard him saying: 'If your admiral pal is a UNESCO delegate, Skouras, then I'm King Neptune. I know who he is. We all know who he is. It's too late in the day now and they know too much. It's them or us'. And then Captain Imrie said: 'I'll send Quinn and Jacques and Kramer at midnight. At one o'clock they'll open the sea-cocks in the Sound'."

"Charming friends your husband has," I murmured.

She looked at me, uncertainly, half-speculatively and said: "Mr. Petersen or Mr. Calvert—"

"It is confusing," I admitted. "Calvert. Philip Calvert."

"Well, Philip, you are in deadly danger."

"Mr. Calvert," Uncle Arthur said sourly, "is quite aware of the danger. You are a very brave woman, Charlotte. You took a great risk in eavesdropping. You might have been caught."

"I was caught, Sir Arthur." The smile showed up the lines on either side of her mouth but didn't touch her eyes. "That is another reason why I am here. Even without the knowledge of your danger, yes, I would have come. My husband caught me. He took me into my stateroom." She stood up shakily, turned her back to us and pulled up the sodden dark shirt. Right across her back ran three great blue-red weals. Uncle Arthur stood stock-still, a man incapable of movement. I crossed the saloon and peered at her back. The weals were almost an inch wide and running halfway round her body. Here and there were tiny blood-spotted punctures. Lightly I tried a finger on one of the weals. The flesh was raised and puffy, a fresh weal, as lividly-genuine a weal as ever I'd clapped eyes on. She didn't move. I stepped back and she turned to face us.

"It is not nice, is it? It does not feel very nice." She smiled and again that smile.

Uncle Arthur burst out, "My dear Charlotte, what you must have suffered. It's fiendish, absolutely fiendish. He must be—he must be inhuman. No-one would ever have believed it!"

"Except the late Lady Skouras," she said quietly. "I understand now why she was in and out of mental homes several times before she died." She shrugged. "I have no wish to go the same way. I am made of tougher stuff than Madeline Skouras. So I pick up my bag and run away from the ship." She nodded at the small polythene bag of clothes that had been tied to her waist.

"They'll be here long before midnight when they discover you're gone," I observed.

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"It may be morning before they find out. Most nights I lock my cabin door. Tonight I locked it from the outside."

"That helps," I said. "Standing about in those sodden clothes doesn't. There's no point in running away only to die of pneumonia. You'll find towels in my cabin. Then we can get you a room in Torbay."

"I had hoped for better than that. You would put me in the first place they would look for me. There is no safe place for me in Torbay. They will catch me and bring me back and my husband will take me into that stateroom again. My only hope is to run away. Your only hope is to run away. Please. Can we not run away together?"

"No."

She turned towards Uncle Arthur, took both his hands in hers and said in a low voice: "Sir Arthur. I appeal to you as an English gentleman. May I stay? Please?"

Uncle Arthur looked at me, hesitated, looked at Charlotte Skouras, looked into those big brown eyes and was a lost man.

"Of course you may stay, Charlotte." He gave a stiff old-fashioned bow which, I had to admit, went very well with the beard and the monocle.

"Thank you, Sir Arthur. It would be nice, Philip, to have the consent—what do you say?—unanimous."

"If Sir Arthur wishes to expose you to a vastly greater degree of risk aboard this boat than you would experience in Torbay, that is Sir Arthur's business. As for the rest, my consent is not required. I'm a well-trained civil servant and I obey orders."

"You are gracious to a fault," Uncle Arthur said acidly.

"Sorry, sir." I'd suddenly seen the light and a pretty dazzling beam it was, too. "I should not have called your judgment in question. The lady is very welcome. But I think she should remain below while we are alongside the pier, sir."

"A reasonable request and a wise precaution," Uncle Arthur said mildly.

"It won't be for long," I smiled at Charlotte Skouras. "We leave Torbay within the hour."

"What do I care what you charge him with?" I looked from Sergeant MacDonald to the broken-faced man with the wet blood-stained towel, then back to MacDonald again. "Breaking and entering. Assault and battery. Illegal possession of a dangerous weapon with intent to create a felony—murder. Anything you like."

"Well, now. It's just not quite as easy as that," Sergeant MacDonald said. "He didn't break and enter, Mr. Petersen. He boarded. No law against that. Assault and battery? It looks as if he has been the victim and not the perpetrator. And what kind of weapon was he carrying, Mr. Petersen?"

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"I don't know. It must have been knocked overboard."

"I see. Knocked overboard, was it? So we have no real proof of any felonious intent."

I was becoming a little tired of Sergeant MacDonald. He was fast enough to co-operate with bogus Customs officers but with me he was just being deliberately obstructive. I said: "You'll be telling me next that it's all a product of my fevered imagination."

The brown face turned red and, on the counter, the brown knuckles turned ivory. He said softly: "You'll kindly not talk to me like that."

"If you insist on behaving like a fool I'll treat you as such. Are you going to lock him up?"

"It's only your word against his."

"No. I had a witness. He's down at the old pier now, if you want to see him. Admiral Sir Arthur Arnford-Jason. A very senior civil servant." I nodded at the prisoner. "Why don't you ask a few questions of our friend here?"

"I've sent for the doctor. He'll have to fix his face first. I can't understand a word he says."

"The state of his face doesn't help," I admitted. "But the main trouble is that he speaks in Italian."

"Italian, is it? I'll soon fix that. The owner of the Western Isles Café is an Italian."

"That helps. There are four little questions he might put to our pal here. Where is his passport, how he arrived in this country, who is his employer and where does he live."

The sergeant looked at me for a long moment, then said slowly: "It's a mighty queer marine biologist that you are, Mr. Petersen."

"And it's a mighty queer police sergeant that you are, Mr. MacDonald. Good night."

I crossed the dimly-lit street to the sea-wall and waited in the shadow of a phone booth. After two minutes a man with a small bag came hurrying up the street and turned into the police station. He was out again in five minutes, which wasn't surprising: there was little a G.P. could do for what was plainly a hospital job.

The station door opened again and Sergeant MacDonald came hurrying out. He walked quickly along the sea wall, looking neither to left nor right, which made it very easy for me to follow him, and turned down the old stone pier. At the end of the pier he flashed a torch, went down a flight of steps and began to haul in a small boat. I leaned over the pier wall and switched on my own torch.

"Why don't they provide you with a telephone or radio for conveying urgent messages?" I asked. "You could catch your death of cold rowing out to the *Shangri-la* on a night like this."

He straightened slowly and let the rope fall from his hands.

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The boat drifted out into the darkness. He came up the steps with the slow heavy tread of an old man and said quietly: "What did you say about the *Shangri-la*?"

"Don't let me keep you, Sergeant," I said affably. "Duty before the idle social chit-chat. Your first duty is to your masters."

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said emptily. "The *Shangri-la*—I'm not going anywhere near the *Shangri-la*."

"Where are you going, then?"

"And how would you like to mind your own damn business?" MacDonald said heavily.

"That's what I'm doing. Come off it, Sergeant. Think I give a damn about our Italian pal? I just threw him at you, together with a hint that you yourself were up to no good, to see what the reaction would be, to remove the last doubts in my mind. You reacted beautifully."

"I'm maybe not the cleverest, Mr. Petersen," he said with dignity. "Neither am I a complete idiot. I thought you were one of them or after the same thing as them." He paused. "You're not. You're a government agent."

"I'm a civil servant." I nodded to where the *Firecrest* lay not twenty yards away. "You'd better come to meet my boss."

"I don't take orders from civil servants."

"Suit yourself," I said indifferently, turned away and looked out over the sea-wall. "About your two sons, Sergeant MacDonald. The sixteen-year-old twins who, I'm told, died in the Cairngorms some time back."

"What about my sons?" he said tonelessly.

"Just that I'm not looking forward to telling them that their own father wouldn't lift a finger to bring them back to life."

He just stood there in the darkness, quite still, saying nothing. He offered no resistance when I took his arm and led him towards the *Firecrest*.

Uncle Arthur was at his most intimidating and Uncle Arthur in full intimidating cry was a sight to behold. "So your foot slipped, Sergeant," Uncle Arthur said. "The fact that you stand here now indicates that. Mr. Calvert went ashore with a prisoner and enough rope for you to hang yourself and you seized it with both hands. Not very clever of you, Sergeant. You should not have tried to contact your friends."

"They are no friends of mine, sir," MacDonald said bitterly.

"I'm going to tell you as much as you need to know about Calvert—Petersen was a pseudonym—and myself and what we are doing." Uncle Arthur hadn't heard him. "If you ever repeat any part of what I say to anyone, it will cost you your job, your pension, and several years in prison for contravention of the Official Secrets Act. Do I make myself clear?"

"You make yourself very clear," MacDonald said grimly.

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So Uncle Arthur told him all he thought MacDonald needed to know, which wasn't much, and finished by saying: "I am sure we can now count on your hundred per cent co-operation, Sergeant."

"Calvert is just guessing at my part in this," he said dully.

"For God's sake!" I said. "You *knew* those Customs officers were bogus. You *knew* they had no photo-copier with them. You *knew* their only object in coming aboard was to locate and smash that set—and locate any other we might have. You *knew* they couldn't have gone back to the mainland in that launch—it was too rough. The launch, was, in fact, the *Shangri-la*'s tender —which is why you left without lights—and no launch left the harbour after your departure. We'd have heard it. And how did you *know* the telephone lines were down in the Sound? You knew they were down, but why did you say the Sound? Because you *knew* they had been cut there. And your two sons, Sergeant, the boys supposed to be dead, you forgot to close their savings accounts. Because you *knew* they weren't dead."

MacDonald said slowly, "I'm afraid I'm not good at this sort of thing." He looked at Uncle Arthur. "I know this is the end of the road for me. They said they would kill my boys, sir."

"If you will extend us your full co-operation," Uncle Arthur said precisely, "I will personally see to it that you remain the Torbay police sergeant. Who are 'they'?"

"The only men I've seen is a fellow called Captain Imrie and the two Customs men—Durran and Thomas. Durran's real name is Quinn. I don't know the others' names. I usually meet them in my house, after dark. I've been out to the *Shangri-la* only twice. To see Imrie."

"And Sir Anthony Skouras?"

"I don't know." MacDonald shrugged helplessly. "He's a good man, sir, he really is. Or I thought so. Maybe he is mixed up in this."

"What's been your part in this?"

"There's been funny things happening in this area in the past months. Boats have vanished. People have vanished. This is when Captain Imrie wants to prevent certain boats from going certain places at the wrong time."

"And your part is to investigate with great diligence and a total lack of success," Uncle Arthur nodded. "You must be invaluable to them, Sergeant. A man with your record and character is above suspicion. Tell me, Sergeant, what are they up to?"

"Before God, sir, I have no idea."

"I don't doubt it. This is the way the very top men operate. And you will have no idea where your boys are being held?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know they're alive?"

"I was taken out to the *Shangri-la* three weeks ago. My sons

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had been brought there from God only knows where. They were well. Captain Imrie said they would come to no harm. If I co-operated. He said that only fools ever used unnecessary violence."

"You are convinced, then, they wouldn't go to the length of murder?"

"Murder! What are you talking about, sir?"

I took MacDonald's arm and led him to the engine-room. When we came back to the saloon in a minute's time his face was pale.

"I told you that Calvert carried out a helicopter reconnaissance today," Uncle Arthur said conversationally. "What I didn't tell you was that his pilot was murdered this evening. I didn't tell you that two other of my best agents have been killed in the last sixty hours. And now, as you've just seen, Hunslett. Do you still believe, Sergeant, that we are dealing with a bunch of gentlemanly law-breakers?"

"What do you want me to do, sir?" Colour was back in his cheeks again and the eyes were cold and hard.

"You and Calvert will take Hunslett ashore to your office. You will call in the doctor and ask for an official *post-mortem*—we must have an official cause of death. For the trial. The other dead men are probably beyond recovery. You will then row out to the *Shangri-la* and tell Imrie that we brought Hunslett and the other man—the Italian—to your office. You will tell them that you heard us say that we must go to the mainland for new depth-sounding equipment and for armed help and that we can't be back for two days at least. Do you know where the telephone lines are cut in the Sound?"

"Yes, sir. I cut them myself."

"When you get back from the *Shangri-la* get out there and fix them. Before dawn. And before dawn tomorrow you, your wife and son must disappear—if you want to live. One last thing. Hunslett has no relations so he may as well be buried in Torbay. Knock up your local undertaker during the night and make arrangements for the funeral on Friday. Calvert and I would like to be there."

"But—but Friday? That's just the day after tomorrow."

"The day after tomorrow. It will be all over then. You'll have your boys back home."

MacDonald looked at him in long silence, then said slowly, "How can you be sure?"

"I'm not sure at all." Uncle Arthur passed a weary hand across his face and looked at me. "Calvert is. If it can be done, Calvert can do it. I certainly hope so."

"I certainly hope so, too," MacDonald said sombrely.

Me too, more than either of them; but there was already so much despondency around that it didn't seem right to deepen it,

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so I just put on my confident face and led MacDonald back down to the engine-room . . .

Three of them came to kill us, not at midnight as promised, but at 10.40 p.m. that night. Had they come five minutes earlier then they would have got us, because five minutes earlier we were still tied up to the old stone pier. And had they come and got us that five minutes earlier, then the fault would have been mine for, after leaving Hunslett in the police station, I had insisted that Sergeant MacDonald accompany me to use his authority in knocking up and obtaining service from the proprietor of the only chemist's shop in Torbay. Neither of them had been too keen on giving me the illegal help I wanted and it had taken me a full five minutes and the best part of my extensive repertoire of threats to extract from the very elderly chemist the minimum of reluctant service and a small green-ribbed bottle informatively labelled *The Tablets*. But I was lucky and I was back aboard the *Firecrest* just after 10.30 p.m.

A minute after leaving the pier I had to switch on the searchlight mounted on the wheelhouse roof. I moved it to point the beam down and ahead, then traversed it through a forty-degree arc on either side of the bows.

I picked up the first boat inside five seconds, not a yacht riding at its moorings but a rowing dinghy moving slowly through the water. It was fine on the port bow, maybe fifty yards away. I couldn't identify the man at the oars—the oars wrapped at their middle with some white cloth to muffle the sound of the rowlocks—because his back was towards me. A very broad back. Quinn. The man in the bows was sitting facing me. He wore oilskins and a dark beret and in his hand he held a gun. At fifty yards it's almost impossible to identify any weapon, but his looked like a German Schmeisser machine-pistol. Without a doubt Jacques, the machine-gun specialist. The man crouched low in the sternsheets was quite unidentifiable, but I could see the gleam of a short gun in his hand. Messrs. Quinn, Jacques and Kramer coming to pay their respects as Charlotte Skouras had said they would. But much ahead of schedule.

Charlotte Skouras was on my right in the darkened wheelhouse. She'd been there only three minutes, having spent all our time alongside in her darkened cabin with the door closed. Uncle Arthur was on my left. I reached up for a clipped torch and patted my right-hand pocket to see if my little Lilliput was still there. It was. I said to Charlotte Skouras: "Open the wheelhouse door. Put it back on the catch and stand clear." Then I said to Uncle Arthur, "Take the wheel, sir. Hard a-port when I call. Then back north on course again."

He took the wheel without a word. I heard the starboard wheelhouse door click on its latch. We were doing no more than

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three knots through the water. The dinghy was twenty-five yards away, the men in the bows and stern holding up arms to shield their eyes from our searchlight. Quinn had stopped rowing. On our present course we'd leave them at least ten feet on our port beam. I kept the searchlight steady on the boat.

Twenty yards separated us and I could see Jacques lining up his machine-pistol on our light when I thrust the throttle lever right open. The note of the big diesel exhaust deepened and the *Firecrest* began to surge forward.

"Hard over now," I said.

Uncle Arthur spun the wheel. The sudden thrust of our single port screw boiled back against the port-angled rudder, pushing the stern sharply to starboard. Flame lanced from Jacques' machine-pistol, a silent flame; he'd a silencer on. Bullets ricocheted off our aluminium foremast but missed both light and wheelhouse. Quinn saw what was coming and dug his oars deep, but he was too late. I shouted, "Midships, now," pulled the throttle lever back to neutral and jumped out through the starboard doorway on to the deck.

We hit them just where Jacques was sitting, breaking off the dinghy's bows, capsizing it and throwing the three men into the water. The overturned remains of the boat and a couple of struggling figures came slowly down the starboard side of the *Firecrest*. My torch picked up the man closer in to our side. Jacques, with the machine-pistol held high above his head, instinctively trying to keep it dry though it must have been soaked when he had been catapulted into the water. I held gun-hand and torch-hand together, aiming down the bright narrow beam. I squeezed the Lilliput's trigger twice and a bright crimson flower bloomed where his face had been. He went down as if a shark had got him, the gun still in the stiffly-upstretched arms. It was a Schmeisser machine-pistol all right. I shifted the torch. There was only one other to be seen in the water and it wasn't Quinn, he'd either dived under the *Firecrest* or was sheltering under the upturned wreck of the dinghy. I fired twice more at the second figure and he started to scream. The screaming went on for two or three seconds, then stopped in a shuddering gurgle. I had urgent matters to attend to, such as preventing Uncle Arthur from cleaving Torbay's old stone pier in half. I jumped into the wheelhouse, pulled the throttle all the way to astern and spun the wheel to port. I said: "With all respect, sir, what the hell were you trying to do?"

I moved the throttle to slow ahead, took the wheel from him and brought the *Firecrest* round till we were due north on a compass bearing. I said: "Keep it there, please," and did some more traversing with the searchlight. The waters around were black and empty, there was no sign even of the dinghy. I'd expected to see every light in Torbay lit up like a naval review—those four

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shots, even the Lilliput's sharp, lightweight cracks, should have had them all on their feet. But nothing, no sign, no movement at all.

Uncle Arthur was determinedly heading straight for the shore again. I took the wheel from him, gently but firmly, and said: "You came a bit close to the pier back there, sir."

"I believe I did. Damn glass misted up just at the wrong moment. I trust, Calvert, that you weren't just firing at random out there."

"I got Jacques and Kramer. Jacques was the handy one with the automatic arms. He's dead. I think Kramer is, too. Quinn got away." What a set-up, I thought bleakly, what a set-up. Alone with Uncle Arthur on the high seas in the darkness of the night. I'd always known that his eyesight, even in optimum conditions, was pretty poor; but I'd never suspected that, when the sun was down, he was virtually blind as a bat. To all intents and purposes I was single-handed. This called for a radical revision in plans.

"Not too bad," Uncle Arthur said approvingly. "Pity about Quinn, but otherwise not too bad at all. Do you think they'll come after us?"

"No."

Till that moment the only source of illumination we'd had in the wheelhouse had come from the reflected light of the compass lamp. Suddenly the overhead light came on. Charlotte Skouras' hand was on the switch. Her face was haggard and she was staring at me as if I were the thing from outer space.

"What kind of man are you, Mr. Calvert?" Her voice was lower and huskier than ever and it had a shake in it. "You—you're not human. You kill two men and go on speaking calmly and reasonably as if nothing had happened. What in God's name are you, a hired killer? It's—it's unnatural. Have you no feelings, no emotions, no regrets?"

"Yes, I have. I'm sorry I didn't kill Quinn, too."

She stared at me with something like horror in her face, then switched her gaze to Uncle Arthur. She said to him, and her voice was almost a whisper: "I saw that man, Sir Arthur. I saw his face being blown apart by the bullets. Mr. Calvert could have—could have arrested him, held him up and handed him over to the police. But he didn't. He killed him. And the other. It was slow and deliberate. Why, why, why?"

"There's no 'why' about it, my dear Charlotte." Sir Arthur sounded almost irritable. "There's no justification needed. Calvert killed them or they killed us. They came to kill us."

She looked at him for a long moment, her face uncomprehending, looked at me, then turned and left the wheelhouse.

She reappeared exactly at midnight, switching on the light again as she entered. From the way she eased her shoulders I

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could see that her back hurt. She gave me a faint tentative smile. She got none in return.

I said: "Half an hour ago, rounding Carrara Point, I near as dammit carried away the lighthouse. Now I hope I'm heading north of Dubh Sgeir but I may be heading straight into the middle of it. It couldn't be any blacker if you were a mile down in an abandoned coal-mine; it's getting foggy; I'm a not very experienced sailor trying to navigate my way through the most dangerous waters in Britain; whatever hope we have of survival depends on the preservation of what night-sight I've slowly and painfully built up over the past hour or so. *Put out that damned light!*"

"I'm sorry." The light went out. "I didn't think."

"And don't switch on any other lights, either. Not even in your cabin. Rocks are the least of my worries in Loch Houron."

"I'm sorry," she repeated. "And I'm sorry about earlier on. That's why I came up. To tell you that. About the way I spoke and leaving so abruptly, I mean. I've no right to sit in judgment on others—and I think my judgment was wrong. I was just—well, literally shocked. To see two men killed like that . . ." Her voice faded away uncertainly.

"You might as well get your facts and figures right, my dear," Uncle Arthur said. "Three men, not two. He killed one just before you came on board tonight. He had no option. But Philip Calvert is not what any reasonable man would call a killer. He doesn't care in the way you say, because if he did he would go mad. In another way, he cares very much. He cares for the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil, and when that difference is great enough and the evil threatens to destroy the good, then he does not hesitate to take steps to redress the balance. And maybe that makes him better than either you or me, my dear Charlotte.

"I'm sorry, Calvert," Uncle Arthur continued. "No offence and no embarrassment, I hope. But if Charlotte thought it important enough to come up here and apologise, I thought it important enough to set the record straight."

"That's not all Charlotte came up for," I said nastily. "*If* that's what she came up for in the first place. She came up here because she's consumed with feminine curiosity. She wants to know where we are going."

She lit a cigarette and said: "Consumed with curiosity is right. What do you think? Not about where we're going. I know where we're going. You told me. Up Loch Houron. What I want to know is what is going on, what all this dreadful mystery is about, why all the comings and goings of strange men aboard the *Shangri-la*. What you are doing here, what you are, who you are. I never really thought you were a UNESCO delegate, Sir

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Arthur. I now know you're not. Please. I have the right to know."

"Don't tell her," I advised.

"Why ever not?" Uncle Arthur said huffily. "As she says, she is deeply involved, whether she wants it or not. Charlotte is an old and dear friend, a *trusted* friend, Calvert. She shall know."

Charlotte said quietly: "I have the feeling that our friend Mr. Calvert does not care for me overmuch. Or maybe he just does not care for women."

"I care like anything," I said. "I was merely reminding the Admiral of his own dictum: Never tell anyone anything unless it's necessary, essential and vital."

Uncle Arthur ignored me. He said: "This is the case of the missing ships, my dear Charlotte. Five missing ships, to be precise. Not to mention a fair scattering of very much smaller vessels, also missing or destroyed. Apart from their disappearances and the safe reappearances of their crews, those five vessels all had one thing in common: they were carrying extremely valuable and virtually untraceable cargoes—bullion and specie worth millions of pounds. We had no idea where the people responsible for these disappearances were getting their information. Such arrangements as to the decision to ship, when, how and how much, are made in conditions of intense secrecy. They, whoever 'they' are, had impeccable sources of information. Calvert says he knows those sources now. After the disappearance of the first three ships it was obvious that a meticulously organised gang was at work.

"It was Calvert's idea to hide two of our men and a radio signal transmitter on most of the ships that sailed with cargoes of bullion or specie after the third ship had vanished. We had no difficulty, as you can imagine, in securing the co-operation of the various exporting and shipping companies and governments concerned. Our agents usually hid among the cargo or in some empty cabin or machinery space with a food supply. Only the masters of the vessels concerned knew they were aboard. They delivered a fifteen-second homing signal at fixed but highly irregular intervals. Those signals were picked up at selected receiving stations round the west coast and by a receiver aboard this very boat here.

"Between 17th May and 6th August, nothing happened. No piracy. We had two men aboard the *Nantesville*, the ship that sailed last Saturday. Delmont and Baker. The *Nantesville* was forcibly taken just off the Bristol Channel. Baker and Delmont immediately began the scheduled transmissions. Cross-bearings gave us a completely accurate position at least every half-hour. Calvert and Hunslett were in Dublin, waiting. The *Firecrest* moved out, not following the *Nantesville*, but moving ahead of its predicted course. They reached the Mull of Kintyre and had intended waiting till the *Nantesville* approached there, but a

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south-westerly gale blew up out of nowhere and the *Firecrest* had to run for shelter. When the *Nantesville* reached the Mull of Kintyre area our radio-beacon fixes indicated that she was still on a mainly northerly course and it looked as if she might pass up the Mull of Kintyre on the outside—the western side. Calvert took a chance, ran up Loch Fyne and through the Crinan canal. He spent the night in the Crinan sea-basin. The sea-lock is closed at night.

"During the night the *Nantesville* turned out west into the Atlantic. Calvert left Crinan at dawn, almost at the very minute the *Nantesville* turned back east again. Radio transmissions were still coming in from Baker and Delmont exactly on schedule. The last transmission came at 1022 hours that morning; after that, nothing."

Uncle Arthur stopped and then he went on very quickly as if he didn't like what he had to say next.

"We don't know what happened. Calvert thinks, and I agree with him, that by the one unpredictable chance in ten thousand, the hijacking crew's radio-operator happened to be traversing Baker and Delmont's wave-band at the very moment they were sending their fifteen-second transmission. At that range he'd about have his head blasted off and the rest was inevitable.

"A plot of the *Nantesville*'s fixes between dawn and the last transmission showed her course as 082° true. Predicted destination—Loch Houron. Estimated time of arrival—sunset. Calvert had less than a third of the *Nantesville*'s distance to cover. But he didn't take the *Firecrest* into Loch Houron because he was pretty sure that Captain Imrie would recognise a radio-beacon transmitter when he saw one and would assume that we had his course. So he parked the *Firecrest* in Torbay and was skulking around the entrance to Loch Houron in a frogman's suit and with a motorised rubber dinghy when the *Nantesville* turned up. He went aboard in darkness. The name was changed, the flag was changed, one mast was missing and the superstructure had been repainted. But it was the *Nantesville*.

"Next day Calvert and Hunslett were storm-bound in Torbay but on Wednesday Calvert organised an air search for the *Nantesville* or some place where she might have been hidden. He made a mistake. He considered it extremely unlikely that the *Nantesville* would still be in Loch Houron, because Imrie knew that we knew that he had been headed there and because the chart showed Loch Houron as being the last place in Scotland where anyone would consider hiding a vessel and because, after Calvert had left the *Nantesville* that evening, she'd got under way and started to move out to Carrara Point. Calvert thought she'd just stayed in Loch Houron till it was dark enough to pass undetected down the Sound of Torbay or round the south of Torbay Island to the mainland. So he concentrated most of his

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search on the mainland and on the Sound of Torbay and Torbay itself. He thinks now the *Nantesville* is in Loch Houron. We're going there to find out. And that's it, my dear. Now, with your permission, I'd like to spend an hour on the saloon settee. He sighed, and finished: "I need my sleep."

"But surely that's not all of it," Charlotte protested. "Mr. Hunslett, where's Mr. Hunslett? And you said Mr. Calvert was aboard the *Nantesville*. How on earth did he—?"

"Very well. If you insist. The violence, I'm afraid, has not all been one sided. Calvert, as I said, was aboard the *Nantesville*. He found my two operatives, Baker and Delmont, had been stabbed to death. This evening, the pilot of Calvert's helicopter was killed when the machine was shot down in the Sound of Torbay. An hour after that Hunslett was murdered. Calvert found him in the *Firecrest*'s engine-room with a broken neck."

When Charlotte spoke the shake was back in her voice: "They are fiends. Fiends. How can you cope with people like that?"

Uncle Arthur said candidly: "I don't intend to try. You don't find generals slugging it out hand-to-hand in the trenches. Calvert will cope with them. Good night, my dear."

After Uncle Arthur had retired, Charlotte and I stood in a companionable silence in the darkened wheelhouse. Because of the rain and fog I had cut down to half speed and with the loss of steerage way and that heavy westerly sea coming up dead astern I'd normally have been hard put to it to control the direction of the *Firecrest*: but I had the auto-pilot on and switched to "Fine" and we were doing famously.

Charlotte said suddenly: "What is it you intend to do tonight?"

"You *are* a glutton for information. Don't you know that Uncle Arthur and I are engaged upon a highly secret mission? Security is all."

"And now you're laughing at me—and forgetting I'm along on this secret mission, too."

"I'm glad you're along and I'm not laughing at you, because I'll be leaving this boat once or twice tonight and I have to have somebody I can trust to look after it when I'm away."

"You have Sir Arthur."

"I have, as you say, Sir Arthur. There's no-one alive for whose judgment and intelligence I have greater respect. But at the present moment I'd trade in all the judgment and intelligence in the world for a pair of sharp young eyes. How are yours?"

"Well, they're not so young any more, but I think they're sharp enough."

"So I can rely on you?"

"On me? I—well, I don't know how to handle boats."

"You and Sir Arthur should make a great team. A pair of

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eyes, Charlotte, that's all I require. A pair of eyes. Just cruising up and down till I come back, and seeing that you don't go on the rocks. Can you do that?"

"I'll try. Where are you going ashore?"

"Craigmore. The innermost island in Loch Houron. If," I said thoughtfully, "I can find it."

She said nothing. After a couple of minutes I felt a hand on my upper arm and she was very close to me. The hand was trembling. Wherever she'd come by her perfume it hadn't been bought in a supermarket or fallen out of a Christmas cracker. Momentarily and vaguely I wondered about the grievous impossibility of ever understanding the feminine mind: before fleeing for what she had thought to be her life and embarking upon a hazardous swim in the waters of Torbay harbour, she hadn't forgotten to pack a sachet of perfume in her polythene kit-bag.

"Philip," she said, "I'm truly sorry about what I said—about what I thought—earlier on. I—well, I didn't know about Hunslett and Baker and Delmont and the helicopter pilot. I'm truly sorry, Philip. Truly."

She was overdoing it. She was also too damn close. Too damn warm. She said nothing else. She just squeezed my arm a bit more.

I was just thinking of switching off the auto-pilot to give me something to do when she said: "I think I'll go below soon. Would you like a cup of coffee first?"

"As long as you don't have to put on a light to do it. And as long as you don't trip over Uncle Arthur—I mean, Sir—"

"Uncle Arthur will do just fine," she said. "It suits him." Another squeeze of the arm and she was gone.

I took a chance, left the *Firecrest* to its own devices and nipped aft to the stern locker. I took out my scuba diving equipment, together with air-cylinders and mask, and brought them for'ard to the wheelhouse.

It took her twenty-five minutes to make the coffee. Even allowing for the difficulties of operating in darkness, this was surely a record for slowness in making coffee at sea. I heard the clatter of crockery as the coffee was brought through the saloon and smiled cynically to myself in the darkness. Then I thought of Hunslett and Baker and Delmont and Williams, and I wasn't smiling any more.

WHEN I set out for the island of Craigmore, I still wasn't smiling. I wasn't smiling because Uncle Arthur and Charlotte Skouras together made a nautical combination that terrified the life out of me; because Craigmore was exposed and reef-haunted; because the fog was thickening; because I was breathless and bruised from big combers hurling me on to unseen reefs on my swim ashore. But I hadn't the time to think any

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more about it, the night was wearing on and I'd much to do before the dawn.

The nearest of the two fishing-boats in the little natural harbour was rolling quite heavily in the waves, so I didn't have to worry too much about any splashing sound I might make as I hauled myself up on deck. It was a typical MFV, about forty-five feet long and with the general look of a boat that could laugh at a hurricane. I went through it in two minutes. All in immaculate condition, not a thing aboard that shouldn't have been there. Just a genuine fishing-boat. The second MFV was the mirror image of the first, down to the last innocuous inch.

I swam ashore, parked my scuba equipment above the high-water mark and made my way to the flensing-shed, keeping its bulk between the light and myself as I went. The shed contained winches, steel tubs and barrels, a variety of ferocious weapons doubtless used for flensing, rolling cranes, some unidentifiable but obviously harmless machinery, the remains of some sharks and the most fearful smell I'd ever come across in my life. I left.

The first two cottages yielded nothing. The third cottage, the one most remote from the flensing-shed, was where the shark-fishers lived. A logical and very understandable choice, one would have thought, the farther away from the stench of that flensing-shed the better.

I eased open the well-oiled door and passed into the front parlour. I flashed my torch around. A short corridor lay beyond. Two doors to the right, three to the left. Working on the theory that the boss of the outfit probably had the largest room to himself, I carefully opened the first door to the right.

The flash-light showed it to be a surprisingly comfortable room. There was a switch beside the door. I touched it and the overhead light came on.

There was only one person in the double bed but even at that he was cramped in it. It's hard to gauge a man's height when he's lying down, but if this lad tried to stand up in a room with a ceiling height of less than six feet four inches, he'd finish up with concussion. His face was towards me but I couldn't see much of it; it was hidden by a head of thick black hair that had fallen over his brows and the most magnificently bushy black beard I'd ever clapped eyes on. He was sound asleep.

I crossed to the bed, prodded his ribs with the gun barrel and a pressure sufficient to wake a lad of his size and said: "Wake up."

He woke up. I moved a respectful distance away. He rubbed his eyes with one hairy forearm, got his hands under him and heaved himself to a sitting position. I wouldn't have been surprised to see him wearing a bearskin, but no, he was wearing a pair of pyjamas in excellent taste.

The man in the beard didn't react in any of the standard ways

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at all. He just stared at me from under dark overhanging cliffs of eyebrows and the expression in the eyes was that of a Bengal tiger mentally tucking in his napkin before launching himself on the thirty-foot leap that is going to culminate in lunch. I stepped back another couple of paces and said: "Don't try it."

"Put that gun away, sonny boy," he said. "Put it away or I'll have to get up and clobber you and take it from you."

"Don't be like that," I complained, then added politely: "If I put it away, will you clobber me?"

He considered this for a moment, then said, "No." He reached out for a big black cigar and lit it, his eyes on me all the time.

"My apologies for the intrusion. Are you Tim Hutchinson?"

"Yeah. And you, sonny boy?"

"Philip Calvert. I want to use one of your boat's transmitters to contact London. I also need your help. How urgently you can't imagine. A good many lives and millions of pounds can be lost in the next twenty-four hours."

"Ain't you the little kidder, now, sonny boy."

"I'm not kidding, you big black ape. And, while we're at it, we'll dispense with the 'sonny boy', Timothy."

He bent forward, the deep-set coal-black eyes not at all as friendly as I would have liked, then relaxed with a laugh. "Maybe you ain't kidding at that. What are you, Calvert?"

In for a penny, in for a pound. This man would grant his co-operation for nothing less than the truth. And he looked like a man whose co-operation would be very well worth having. So, for the second time that night and the second time in my life, I said: "I'm an agent of the British Secret Service."

He considered my reply for some time, then said, "The Secret Service. I guess you have to be at that. Or a nut case. But you blokes never tell."

"I had to. It would have been obvious anyway when I tell you what I have to tell you."

"I'll get dressed. Join you in the front room in two minutes. Help yourself to a Scotch there." The beard twitched and I deduced from this that he was grinning. "You should find some, somewhere."

When Tim Hutchinson came in, he was dressed all in black, trousers, sailor's jersey, mackinaw and seaboots. Beds were deceptive: he'd probably passed the six-foot-four mark when he was about twelve and had just stopped growing.

"You look like a man in a hurry. Just leave out all the inessentials."

I left out the inessentials, but not one of the essentials. Unlike MacDonald and Charlotte, Hutchinson got the whole truth.

"Well, if that isn't the most goddamned story any man ever heard. What do you want, Calvert?"

So I told him what I wanted, his own personal assistance

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that night, the loan of his boats and crews for the next twenty-four hours and the use of a radio transmitter immediately. He nodded.

"Count on us. I'll tell the boys. You can start using that transmitter right away."

"I'd rather go out with you to our boat right away," I said, "leave you there and come back in myself to transmit."

"You lack a mite confidence in your crew, hey?"

"I'm expecting to see the bows of the *Firecrest* coming through that front door any minute."

"I can do better than that. I'll roust out a couple of the boys, we'll take the *Charmaine*—that's the MFV nearest the flensing-shed—out to the *Firecrest*. I'll go aboard and we'll cruise around till you get your message off, then you come aboard the *Firecrest* while the boys take the *Charmaine* back again."

I thought of the mælstrom of white breakers outside the mouth of the alleged harbour. I said: "It won't be too dangerous to take an MFV out on a night like this?"

"What's wrong with a night like this? It's a fine fresh night. You couldn't ask for better. This is nothing, I've seen the boys take a boat out there, into a full gale."

I said no more. It was obviously going to be a great comfort to have Hutchinson around with me for the rest of the night. He turned towards the corridor and hesitated: "Two of the boys are married. I wonder—"

"There'll be no danger for them. Besides, they'll be well rewarded for their work."

"Don't spoil it, Calvert." For a man with such a deep rumbling voice he could make it very soft at times. "We don't take money for this kind of work."

"I'm not hiring you," I said tiredly. "There's an insurance reward. I have been instructed to offer you half."

"Ah, now, that's very different indeed. I'll be delighted to relieve the insurance companies of their excess cash at any time. But not half, Calvert, not half. Not for a day's work, not after all you've done. Twenty-five per cent to us, seventy-five per cent to you and your friends."

"Half is what you get. The other half will be used to pay compensation for those who have suffered hardship."

"You get nothing?"

"I get my salary, the size of which I'd rather not discuss, as it's a sore point."

"You mean to say you get beaten up, shot down, half-drowned and suffer another couple of murder attempts just for a lousy pay check? What makes you tick, Calvert?"

"That's not an original question. I ask myself the same question about twenty times a day, rather more often recently. It's time we were gone."

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"I'll get the boys up. They'll be tickled pink by those gold watches or whatever the insurance boys will be handing over. Engraved, of course. We insist on that."

"The reward will be in cash, not kind. Depends how much of the stolen goods are recovered. We're pretty sure to recover all the *Nantesville*'s cargo. Chances are that we'll recover the lot. The award is ten per cent. Yours will be five. The minimum you and your boys will pick up will be four hundred thousand pounds: the maximum will be eight hundred and fifty. Thousands pounds, I mean."

"At rates like that, a man might expect a fair bit of co-operation. Say no more. Put right out of your head any thoughts you had of advertising in *The Telegraph*. Tim Hutchinson is your man."

And Tim Hutchinson undoubtedly was my man. He was one of that rare breed, that very rare breed, of naturals to whom the sea is truly home. He took the *Charmaine* out through the Scylla and Charybdis of that evil alleged harbour entrance under full throttle. Foaming white-fanged reefs reached out at us, bare feet away, on either side. He didn't seem to notice them. He certainly didn't look at them. Hutchinson located the *Firecrest* a hundred yards before I could even begin to imagine I could see any shape at all and brought the *Charmaine* alongside neatly. I went aboard the *Firecrest* to the vast alarm of Uncle Arthur and Charlotte who'd heard no whisper of our arrival, explained the situation, introduced Hutchinson and went back aboard the *Charmaine*. Fifteen minutes later, the radio call over, I was back aboard the *Firecrest*.

Uncle Arthur and Tim Hutchinson were already thick as thieves. The bearded Australian giant was extremely courteous and respectful, calling Uncle Arthur "Admiral" every other sentence while Uncle Arthur was plainly delighted and vastly relieved to have him on board.

"Where are we off to now?" Charlotte Skouras asked. I was disappointed to see that she was just as relieved as Uncle Arthur.

"Dubh Sgeir," I said. "To pay a call on Lord Kirkside and his charming daughter."

"Dubh Sgeir!" She seemed taken aback.

"The end of the road lies in Dubh Sgeir. And the foot of the rainbow."

"You talk in riddles," she said impatiently.

"Not to me, he doesn't," Hutchinson said jovially. "The foot of the rainbow, ma'am. That's where the pot of gold lies."

"Here and now I'd settle for a pot of coffee," I said. "Coffee for four and I'll make it with my own fair hands."

"I think I would rather go to bed," Charlotte said. "I am very tired."

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"You made me drink your coffee," I said threateningly. "Now you drink mine. Fair's fair."

"If you are quick, then."

I was quick. I'd four cups on a little tin tray in nothing flat; a powerful mixture of instant coffee, milk and sugar in all of them and a little something extra in one of them. There were no complaints about the coffee. Hutchinson drained his cup and said: "Can't see why you three shouldn't get your heads down for a little. Unless you think I need help?"

No-one thought he needed help. Charlotte Skouras was the first to go, saying she felt very sleepy, which I didn't doubt. She sounded it. Uncle Arthur and I left a moment later, Tim Hutchinson promising to call me when we neared the landing-stage on the west side of Dubh Sgeir. Uncle Arthur wrapped himself in a rug on the saloon settee. I went to my own cabin and lay down.

I lay there for three minutes then rose, picked up a three-cornered file, softly opened my cabin door and as softly knocked on Charlotte's door. There was no reply, so I opened the door, passed in, silently closed it and switched on the lights. She was asleep all right. She hadn't even managed to make it to bed, she was lying on the carpet, still fully clothed. I put her on the bunk and pulled a couple of blankets over her. I pushed up a sleeve and examined the mark left by the rope burn.

It wasn't a very big cabin and it took me only a minute to find what I was looking for.

It made a pleasant change and a very refreshing one to transfer myself from the *Firecrest* to land without that damned clammy scuba suit impeding every stroke or step of the way.

How Tim Hutchinson located that old stone pier in the rain, the fog and the darkness, was something that would have been for ever beyond me—if he hadn't told me later that night. He sent me to the bows with a torch in my hand and damned if the thing didn't loom out of the darkness as if he'd gone in on a radio bearing. He went into reverse, brought the bows, plunging heavily in the deep troughs, to within two feet of the pier, waited till I picked my moment to jump off, then went full astern and disappeared into the fog and darkness.

The path from the landing-stage to the plateau above was steep and crumbling and someone had carelessly forgotten to equip it with a hand-rail on the seaward side. I was in no way heavily burdened. All I was carrying, apart from the weight of my own years, was a torch, gun and coil of rope but even so I was breathing pretty heavily by the time I reached the top.

I turned not towards the castle but north along the grass strip that led to the cliff at the northern end of the island. The strip that Lord Kirkside's elder son had taken off from in his Beechcraft on the day when he and his brother-in-law to be had died; the

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strip that I had flown along less than twelve hours previously after our talk with Lord Kirkside and his daughter; the strip at the abrupt northern end of which I'd imagined I'd seen what I'd wanted to see, but couldn't be sure. Now I was going to make sure.

I reached the cliff edge in five minutes and found what I was looking for almost at once. The deep score on the cliff edge was almost eighteen inches in width and four in depth in the centre. The mark was fresh but not too fresh. The grass had grown in again in most places. The time factor would be just about right. It was the mark that had been left by the tail fuselage of the Beechcraft plane when, with no-one aboard, it had been started up, hadn't had enough speed to become airborne and had fallen over the cliff edge, ripping this score in the earth as it had gone.

I continued on towards the castle and nearly walked into the castle wall but saw its loom just in time. I didn't know whether I was to the right or the left of the entrance gate on the landward side, so I felt my way cautiously to the left to find out. After about ten feet the wall fell away at right angles to another wall. That meant I'd arrived at the left or eastern side of the gate. I began to feel my way to the right.

A sentry at the entrance gate was smoking a cigarette. I held the gun by the barrel and moved quietly forwards. I waited till he brought the cigarette end to his mouth for the third time, and when it was glowing at its brightest and his night vision was consequently most affected, I took one step forward and brought the butt down where, by extension of the curve and subsequent glow of the cigarette end, the back of the head of a normal man ought to have been. Fortunately, he was a normal man.

He fell back against me. I caught him and something jabbed painfully into my ribs. I let him finish the trip down on his own and removed this item that had become stuck in my coat. A bayonet and, what was more, a bayonet with a very nasty point to it. Attached to the bayonet was a Lee Enfield .303. It seemed unlikely that this was just a routine precaution. Our friends were becoming worried and I had no means of knowing how much they knew or guessed. Time was running very short for them, almost as short as it was for me. In a few hours it would be dawn.

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Final instalment next month: Philip Calvert discovers the secret of Dubh Sgeir and foils a dangerous gang's attempt to raise their stolen treasure from the depths of the sea

This Argosy serial is condensed from "When Eight Bells Toll," just published by Collins at 21s.

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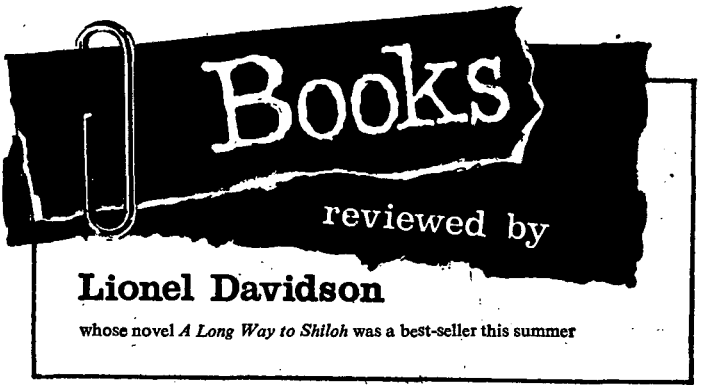

Lionel Davidson

whose novel *A Long Way to Shiloh* was a best-seller this summer

ALMOST worse than writing a book is waiting for it to be reviewed. Almost worse than getting it reviewed is not getting it reviewed. But getting it reviewed is bad enough. Somewhere, in a room, some poor chap has sat with a pile of five or six books, yours amongst them, reading as hard as he could go—and having another quick flip through at the end to see what he has forgotten (which may have been plenty).

In due course his review appears, and you read it with mingled rage and humiliation, or delight and humiliation. Why should you care what he thinks? But somebody cares. Friends and relations may be reading it, too. You care.

So in this distracted period you find yourself buying too many newspapers and periodicals and hunting hungrily through; or hanging about waiting for the postman with his grey envelopes from Durrant's, the cuttings agency to which most authors subscribe: five guineas per hundred, a fantastic bargain—the Americans charge three times the price.

As it happens, as I sit and write this, I am in the same distracted state myself. Reviews are coming in of my own recently-published novel, *A Long Way to Shiloh.* (*Northern Despatch,* Darlington. "*In this, his third book, the author has combined . . .*" M'hm . . . M'hm . . . Oh dear . . . Still, not bad. Nothing basically wrong with them up in Darlington.)

So I know how this month's crop of authors are feeling. And in due course they'll know how I'm feeling, about them. The grey envelope will pop through the letter-box. Inside will be the grey slip marked: *Cutting from:* ARGOSY. *Issue dated:* NOVEMBER 1966. And stuck to it will be:

Papa Hemingway by A. E. Hotchner. This is the big book of the month—and probably of quite a few other months, too.

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Already a best-seller in America, it is now published here by Weidenfeld and Nicolson at 36s. And it's terrific. Whether you like Hemingway or not, or biographies or not, this is one to get hold of. It's practically unputdownable—the record of the slow demolition of a giant, that reads, for much of its length, like one of the master's own works, except that it has the haunting quality of truth and that it is, occasionally, very funny.

Hotchner was a journalist in his mid-twenties when he first met Hemingway in 1948. Hemingway took a shine to him, and over the next fourteen years made him his confidant—in fact his Boswell. This book is the record of those last years, of their meetings, their trips, and of all that Hemingway told him.

It also tells, for the first time, the truth about Hemingway's suicide, of the earlier attempts (at jumping out of an airplane, at walking into the propeller), and of the final grotesque months when Hemingway, a romantic with a heroic view of life, thought his literary potency had gone and didn't want to live any more.

But there is much more than that. There is a magnificent flow of anecdote. This is Hemingway on his American editor:

"Max (Perkins) was a terribly shy man . . . I went back to New York to discuss the book with him, and he said he had only one change which he wanted—the deletion of that pesky four-letter word which seems to be okay verbally, but verboten *on the printed page.*

"Max was too shy to say the word out loud, so he wrote it on his calendar pad. I said it was okay to delete it and suggested that since we had completed the rewriting, we go out to lunch and enjoy ourselves.

"Along about three o'clock that afternoon Charlie Scribner came into Perkins' office to consult him about something, and not finding him at his desk, went over and looked at the calendar pad to see where he was. Opposite twelve o'clock, Charlie found the notation — — — —. Later that afternoon, when Charlie did find Perkins at his desk, he said solicitously, 'Max, why don't you take the rest of the day off? You must be done in.'"

Then there is the story Hemingway told Hotchner, while they were drinking together once at Harry's Bar in Paris. Reminiscing about the bar in the good old days, Hemingway described an ex-boxer who frequented the place with his pet lion. The lion had good manners—no growls or roars—but he had the unfortunate habit of relieving himself on the floor of the bar.

"This, of course, had a rather adverse effect on the trade and, as politely as he could, Harry asked the ex-pug not to bring the lion around any more.

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"But the next day the pug was back with lion, lion dropped another load, drinkers dispersed, Harry again made request. The third day, same thing. Realising it was do or die for poor Harry's business . . . I went over, picked up the pug, who had been a welterweight, carried him outside and threw him in the street. Then I came back and grabbed the lion's mane and hustled him out of here. Out on the sidewalk, the lion gave me a look, but he went quietly.

"In a crazy way, that's what started me on A Farewell to Arms*—figured if I was getting that aggressive with lions, time had come to put my juice into a book instead."*

A marvellous read.

☐ **KREMLIN CAPERS** Next, another American book, a spy-thriller, *The Kremlin Letter* by Noel Behn (W. H. Allen, 25s.). The Americans, surprisingly enough, have never shone in this field, where all the big international names have been British. The reason, perhaps, is the inability of Americans, those interested in the *genre*, anyway, to question the righteousness of their national institutions, or to cultivate a suitably adult approach to the difference in the aims of espionage and of those engaged in it. Most previous offerings, indeed, have been served up with lavish acknowledgment to government agencies, and the general tone has been one of approval for regular guys, family men, engaged in upholding the American way of life.

(Daft, of course. Security work, by its nature, attracts the devious of all nations.)

This one, which has been getting very big treatment in America and is being published with some razzmatazz here, seeks to make amends—not too successfully, but highly readably. Almost everyone in it is a swine, very spry with boot and neck-chop, and with a high tolerance for perversion—though in the line of duty. What the plot is about is hard to say, but it certainly buzzes along, with real-sounding Moscow locations, tricked out with pages and pages of coded memos and security appraisals *à la* Deighton.

The American publishers are offering a money-back guarantee to those failing to read to the end (the last third of the book comes with a seal that has to be broken). What will keep them solvent, I suspect, are passages like the following, a random sample from an abundant stock:

"Ward knocked her unconscious again and raped her. After he had finished he raised the motionless body into a sitting position. He began beating her around the face and shoulders.

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He punched her arms and body and legs. Blood covered her face and torso. Then he strangled her."

☐ **ONE LONG NATTER** Brian Glanville's plot in *A Roman Marriage* (Michael Joseph, 25s.) is a good deal more memorable, but there is certainly not much of it. A tarty young English office girl with a mysterious and unexplained circle of glamorous friends—"television people and several painters and journalists and one in films, and goodness knows what else"—is picked up on the beach at Ostia by a young Italian who beds her, pursues her to England, and marries her.

"A complex personality," as the blurb warns—he is mixed up with a neo-Fascist clique—he then largely loses interest in her, leaving her to her own devices in his widowed mother's fusty Rome flat. The girl, unsatisfied with this purdah-type situation, has an affair with a visiting London bedmate, a sculptor, and leaves her husband; but when he mends his ways and shows interest, returns to him.

The story is told in the first person by the girl, who seems to have not much more to offer in the way of views on life and love than the Italian spotted right off on the beach; so that the effect is of one long natter between girls. The blurb says that it shows "a classic situation: the physical attraction and the psychological tensions that Latins and Anglo-Saxons can have for one another". Well, maybe it does—the "can" offers plenty of scope. But it's certainly a bit thin, and a disappointment from Mr. Glanville who has written to better effect in his day.

☐ **A TRICK IN THE TEXT** *The Eye* by Vladimir Nabokov (Weidenfeld and Nicolson) is, at 18s., rather a shortie—only about ninety large-type pages of text. But it's a highly-beguiling story, and an immensely cunning one, with a trick buried right in the middle. Once you see the trick, you have to read it again. If you don't see the trick, you still read it again. Either way, it's a pleasure, with some comic and some moving moments. It concerns the love affair of a rather cute little devil in the Berlin of the twenties; the cast consists of White Russian émigrés. That's all I will say about it, except that it's quirkily written with all the master's flair (he wrote *Lolita*), and that you can read it *twice* in ninety minutes flat.

☐ **WHOSE GOO?** *The Man Who Was Magic* (Heinemann, 21s.) is another of Paul Gallico's pixilated fables, and God alone knows for whom or what—Walt Disney excepted—it is intended. No child of my acquaintance would willingly immerse himself in such goo. Do pixilated grown-ups read them?

There's this place Mageia, "*the magical city of the magicians*

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of the world". Where? *"Somewhere west of east and just to the south of north and and only a mile or so over the boundary of time . . ."* Got the style?

To it comes Adam, *"a personable fellow, lean and clean of limb, narrow-waisted and wide-shouldered."* Adam is a real magician, unlike those shysters in Mageia (the complete cast of the magicians of Mageia is given at the front of the book—Dante the Dazzling, Frascati the Fantastic, Boldini the Brilliant, etc.), none of whom believe there *is* such a thing as real magic. This is because they are not innocent, pure of heart or some damned thing.

Anyway, they have a magic contest in which Adam shows them what for. He is aided by a whimsical moppet called Jane, herself a keen illusionist and much given to exclaiming "Higgledy-piggledy-parabaloo . . ."

☐ **WELCOME WHIMSY** Whimsy of another kind (and *how* other a kind) comes from P. G. Wodehouse with *Plum Pie* (Jenkins, 25s.). Slap bang on the first page the old wizard manages to touch a humour nerve. Here's Wooster being greeted by Jeeves.

" 'Good evening, sir. Did you have a pleasant visit?'

" 'Not too bad. But I'm glad to be home. What was it the fellow said about home?'

" 'If your allusion is to the American poet John Howard Payne, sir, he compared it to its advantage with pleasures and palaces. He called it sweet and said there was no place like it.' "

Alas, the master allows his standard to slip here and there in this collection of stories and snippets. But any new work by him is still a thing of wonder and delight, and what is here is a decided gain for a miserable world. In addition to Jeeves, there are return appearances by Lord Emsworth, Ukridge and Mr. Mulliner. There is also, at the end, a highly curious and uncharacteristic essay on Humour; not, I hope, indicative of the great funny-bone pummeller at last hanging up his gloves?

☐ **SCRAPES AND LORE** Back to the stern world of fact with *Two in a Bush* (Collins, 25s.), Gerald Durrell's account of a naturalist expedition to the Antipodes and Malaya for the purpose of making TV nature films. It's all quite good extroverted stuff with Durrell laying about him on the subject of New Zealand hotels (mostly horrible) and licensing laws (insane) and demonstrating various humours, ill and boy-scout, when they run into scrapes. He's very interesting indeed when he has his eye on the fauna or is describing the ecology of the mysterious sub-human creation in which man is the intruder.

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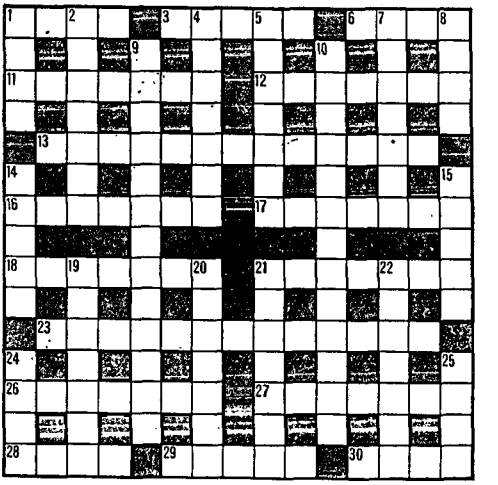
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Just where your heart is! (4).
3 They can burn a Scotland Yard shilling! (5).
6 "Out, damned ——! Out, I say!" (*Macbeth*) (4).
11 A pigeon that spreads disease? (7).
12 Asserted right to medical representation (7).
13 Very funny description of a clown on a flying trapeze? (6, 7).
16 Naturally, it has a pouch and can give us a pencil! (7).
17 Numberless Roman soldiers (7).
18 Jacob put me in gloomy surroundings (7).
21 Short work in prose put forward for consideration (7).
23 Superior ratings? (7, 6).
26 I cannot thus have something inside! (7).
27 Shut up yourself! (7).
28 Kind saint with a heart of gold (4).
29 Study pursued with energy in Central Africa (5).
30 They offer hospitality in different directions (4).

DOWN

1 Cut jade (4).
2 An uncivil Roman poet? (7).
4 Continue to flirt, perhaps (5, 2).
5 A point taken from 12 across (7).
7 Just sanctimonious males put on to some hot stuff! (7).
8 Pretty large orderly? (4).
9 No serious performer can hold a candle to him! (5, 8).
10 A fight in which gun-runners are involved? (7, 2, 4).
14 Kind of guinea that breaks new ground (5).
15 She is put into an old city guide (5).
19 One real change to a girl's name (7).
20 Unexpectedly came across someone on train, possibly (3, 4).
21 Enterprising and aggressive dog swallowing a bone! (7).
22 Harry and spoil the cricketers' consecutive efforts (7).
24 Services there isn't a hope of getting back! (4).
25 Fresh dose of laudatory verse (4).

Printed in England by HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY LTD., AYLESBURY, and published on the tenth of each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, £2 12s. for 12 months, £1 6s. for 6 months. Overseas, £2 11s. for 12 months, £1 5s. 6d. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australia and New Zealand, GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi, KINGSTONS LTD. ARGOSY is sold subject to the following conditions, namely, that it shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, or hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade, except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever

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